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The **FRUIT** of **EVOLUTION**

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Before I knew it,
my life had it made!





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Before I knew it,
my life had it made!

**“Seiichi-kun! No matter what challenges
you face next, your muscles will never
ever betray you!
I want to see your muscles at least
double in girth before we next meet!”**

**Gustle
Clout**
.....
Guildmaster

**Louisse
Palse**
.....
Knight

**Eris
Maclaime**
.....
Receptionist





Saria
Kaiser Kong

"Do you have
any other means
of combat?"

"You bet!
Just look at
these guns!"

"Magic? Hah!
All I need are
my kicks!"

Lulune
Donkey

Beatrice
Lognar
Teacher





"Look! It's
super cute,
huh?"

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THE FRUIT OF EVOLUTION 5

Before I knew it, my
life had it made!

Miku 美紅



Chapter 1: Departure

After going to the palace to tell Barney-san that we were ready to leave for the Barbodel Magic Academy at any time, it was decided that we'd be heading out with him right away. As such, we were waiting for him outside the palace gates. We already had all our stuff packed in my Item Box, so we didn't even have to stop by the inn. I'd asked him how we would get there, and even though Barney-san was planning on returning via teleportation, he couldn't easily take all of us with him. Instead, we'd be taking a carriage there.

It's a little late to bitch about it now, but I bought Lulune to draw carriages and stuff. Now she's riding with the rest of us. Man, shit changes fast around here.

"You take care out there, okay?" came a middle-aged man's voice behind me.

I turned to find Landze-san, the King of Windberg, standing there with a smile. He wasn't alone, either—it seemed like he had half the palace there to say farewell.

"I'll make sure to master the magic you taught me," Florio said with a smile. "Make sure you put the same effort into your next adventure."

Louisse nodded at me seriously. "I'm truly blessed to have you as my mentor. I look forward to continuing our lessons together when you return."

Claudia-san chuckled. "I know you'll do great, Seiichi-kun."

"Don't you have anything better to say, Clau-chan? This is goodbye, you know!" Rona-san protested. "Anyhow, wanna go shopping after this? Uh, bye, Seiichi-san, everyone!"

"I don't think you're in any position to point fingers."

There were more than just the Palace people there, though—a lot of familiar faces from the Guild were in the crowd.

“Seiichi-kun!” Gustle flexed at me. “No matter what challenges you face next, your muscles will never ever betray you! I want to see your muscles at least double in girth before we next meet! I’ll look forward to it!”

“Take care,” Eris said with a cordial wave. “I’m sure you’ll all do swimmingly. Never forget that even the greatest pain or worst humiliation can become euphoric bliss! A whole world of ecstasy awaits your discovery!”

My guildmates all said their goodbyes in turn. Walter-san apparently wanted to be there, too, but he was a little too busy being in jail to see us off.

Surprisingly enough, though, even the noblewoman Adriana-san and the head of the orphanage, Clare-san, were there to see us off.

“Take good care of Altria-chan, now!” Adriana-san said with a wink. “Milk-chan and I are both looking forward to seeing you again.”

“Saria-chaaaaaaaan!!” Clare-san bawled. “I’ll be so dreadfully lonely without you, but I could never hoard all your cuteness for myself! Now go, show the entire world what an absolute angel you are!”

“Thank you for staying with us,” the innkeeper Fina-san said with a warm smile. “Take care out there, now.”

Her husband, Lyle-san, nodded. “Don’t get sick, and try not to get hurt, either. Your health is the most important thing you have.”

Their daughter Mary let out a heavy sigh. “I guess I never got to hear about your love lives after all, but this isn’t the end. Next time you’re in town, make sure to come tell me!”

Even the café-owner Noard-san, and my first friend in town, Claude-san, the guard, were there.

“Be well, Seiichi-san,” Noard-san said with a reserved nod. “Feel free to stop by anytime. My doors are always open to you.”

Claude-san scratched his head. “I, uh... I don’t know what to say. It feels like you just got here yesterday, and it’s hard to believe you’re moving on so soon. Just... stay safe, okay? We’ll be waiting for you, so come back anytime.”

All of them had come just to see us off.

“Thanks, everyone,” I managed to say. That alone was a struggle, though—I felt so grateful and touched that I couldn’t squeak another word.

Japan was my homeland, and it always would be, but I never felt truly at home there. It was like I was only scraping by from day to day. Terbelle, however, was the first town I’d visited in this world, and it had taught me more than I ever could’ve dreamed. It welcomed me in a way Japan never had, and I’d never felt so moved. I could say it was the most important place in either world to me, no doubt about it. I was glad I’d chosen to go there after my stint in the Forest of Endless Heartbreak.

Still, I couldn’t waffle around all day, so we reluctantly climbed into the carriage.

“Thank you so much, everyone! Goodbye for now!”

“Come back soon!” they called back to me.

“Bye-bye!” Saria waved at them.

“Take care, everybody!”

“Farewell! I solemnly swear I will return for lunch someday!”

“... Bye.”

The four girls all waved goodbye from the windows. Fortunately, only the five of us and Barney-san were in the carriage, so we didn’t have to worry about not making trouble for anyone else. We kept waving until we eventually passed out of sight, leaving the cobbled streets of Terbelle behind us.

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“Landze has a rather nice city, doesn’t he?” Barney-san remarked with a smile as soon as the capital was out of sight.

“Yeah... He sure does.”

“You’re not feeling lonely, are you?” he asked softly.

“Yeah, I am,” I replied honestly. “They welcomed a weirdo like me and made me feel genuinely at home. It’s not like this is goodbye forever, though. I want

to be a better man before I come back, so I'm determined to become more mature before then."

"Ah, I see." He nodded sagely before readjusting his posture and clearing his throat slightly. "If you don't mind, Seiichi-kun, I'd like to use this opportunity to reveal my plans for you at the Academy."

"Come to think of it, you didn't tell me the specifics, did you?"

All I knew was that he wanted me to be an instructor there.

"For one, I'll be enrolling Saria-kun as a student. She'll receive a full explanation of what that means once we arrive."

"Okie-dokie!"

"As for your adventurer friend... Altria-kun, was it? I wish to have her join as a professor, but instead of being placed in charge of a class, I would like her to teach a special class we call Adventuring Studies. We've hired adventurers to teach in the past, but as they were always active guild members, none of them were able to stay for long. I hope that Altria-kun can provide some more consistent instruction."

"Okay," she nodded readily. "So what do I teach them?"

"Nothing complex. The class consists of important adventuring mindsets, useful knowledge in the profession, and simple combat drills."

"Roger that. I've never taught anyone anything before, so I don't know how it'll go, but I'll give it a shot."

"Good." With a short nod, he turned to Lulune. "Now, for you, you're free to do as you please."

"What?! Why am I the only one to be treated so offhandedly?!"

I'd disagree, but honestly, Lulune has a point. That's a little too hands-off.

"In that case, would you care to become a student with Saria-kun?"

"And why, pray tell, would I do that?"

"Well, I'm not sure if this is much of a reason, but we do offer free buffet-style meals—"

“I gratefully accept your offer.”

Barney-san’s eyes flew open. “So soon?!”

Lulune’s obsession with food was almost supernatural at his point. I had to admire that about her.

Barney-san quickly recovered from his shock, however, and cleared his throat. “At any rate... Origa-kun, I would like to appoint you as Seiichi-kun’s assistant. You will be tasked with supporting him throughout his classes.”

“Mm.” She nodded. “I get to be with Seiichi-oniichan...”

“Wonderful. In that case, I would like to explain your task, Seiichi-kun.”

“Yeah?”

For some reason, he paused, his brow furrowing. “Well...I suppose I should explain the Academy’s present state to you first.”

“Why? Is something wrong?”

“You might say that. You see, the Heroes summoned by the Kaizell Empire have recently joined us. As you might expect, they have truly stunning potential, and their time with us has only accelerated their growth. They’ve begun to look down on their peers as a result—with more than a hint of a discriminatory bend, I might say.”

“...”

“Now, the Academy strives to be as neutral as possible in international affairs, but our position is rather precarious now. If we punish the Heroes for their actions, the Kaizell Empire may use that as an excuse to harm our other students. Regrettably, that means I’m unable to so much as scold the Heroes.”

“Well, that sucks.”

“Unfortunately, the trouble doesn’t end there. The Heroes have instantly filled the top rosters of our Academy’s honor roll. While we do have some other students capable of matching their skills, they’re few and far between. Your task will be to nurture those students’ talents so that they may equal, or perhaps even surpass the Heroes’ power.”

“Wait, what?!”

I was just the bullied fat kid on Earth, but now I’m supposed to teach a whole class? How? There’s no way I can do that!

“H-Hold on a minute! I’m not even that used to teaching people, let alone heading up an entire class!”

“No need to fret, now. I’ll be assigning a teaching assistant to you—and besides, you’ve proven your worth as an instructor with Louisse-kun and Florio-kun both. I’ve heard that you’ve mastered magic nobody has even heard of, so I imagine a few children will be no issue for you.”

“...”

Fat chance. I’m gonna screw those kids up real bad; I know it!

I flapped my mouth open and shut like a goldfish, desperately trying to find the words to turn him down, but Barney-san only chuckled.

“Don’t fret, now! I’m sure you’ll raise wonderful anti-Heroes one way or another!”

“What, you want me to raise a class of Demon Kings or something?!”

Besides, beating the Heroes is generally a bad thing!

“Ohoho! No need to sweat the details. I’m banking on your talents to see you through.”

“...”

I felt like I should really say something to that, but I didn’t know where to begin.

“Oh, and one more thing,” he added as if it weren’t a big deal. “Your class will be small, but your students have something of a reputation for being misfits and dropouts. Teach them well, now.”

“But why, though?”

I honestly didn’t know what to say to that.

Wouldn’t you normally choose the kids with really good grades to go head-to-head with the Heroes?! Why?!

Barney-san was still smiling, though. I was beginning to doubt that he wanted to trump the Heroes at all. Then again, I was kind of a failure, so I had no room to complain. Besides, my Instruction Skill was probably all I'd need.

Ultimately, I decided to stop thinking about it and focus on beefing up my future students.

We rode in silence for a while before Barney-san looked out the window and spoke again.

"It seems we have some uninvited guests."

"Huh?"

He sighed. "There are bandits hidden in those hills, watching us."

"They what?!"

I activated my Clairvoyance Skill, and sure enough, little red 'enemy' blips surrounded us on my mind's radar. Worse, they were all heading straight for us.

The driver also seemed to notice them and hurriedly stopped the horses. "Bandits!"

"Wh-What do we do?" I asked him worriedly.

"What is there to do but fight?" Suddenly, his eyes flew open, and his lips slowly parted into a smile. "It seems we won't have to do a thing after all."

"We what?"

I had no idea what he was talking about. From what I could tell, the enemies were quickly closing in on us from all sides. There was no way out for us now.

Chapter 2: A Champion of Justice?

“Hey, you asshats in the carriage! Get out here and cough up all your loot!”

Before I could see hide nor hair of whoever was supposedly coming to save us, the bandits outside started barking at us. I looked out the window to see a sea of sneering faces and more than a few guys licking their daggers like psychos.

I know that’s a trop of whatever, but they really shouldn’t— “Ow! Thit! That hurts!!” Sure enough, one of the bandits sliced his tongue open and started rolling around on the ground in agony.

See? Are these guys idiots, or what? Unless their knives somehow taste good or something.

“Do those daggers taste good?” Lulune drooled interestedly at them.

Not you, too!

The band looked like they were trying a little too hard to come off as bandits. But they had enough men to totally encircle our carriage—not to mention that their weapons looked like they were at least decent. They were likely decently famous highwaymen.

“What now?” the driver asked us from his seat. He’d apparently gotten his cool back. I didn’t know if he recognized Barney-san, but this clearly wasn’t his first rodeo. He had it way more together than I did; that much was sure.

Barney-san only kicked up his feet. “Nobody frets, now. Our charming young rescuer will handle it.”

“Who?”

I looked back at my mental radar to find a green blip rapidly approaching the bandits from behind.

“B-Boss!” one of the highwaymen shouted. “We’re under attack!”

“What?!” The biggest man there, a guy with a red bandana wrapped around his head, hurriedly looked around. “How many are there?!”

“Uh... Only on—bwegh?!”

A young man suddenly zipped in between the boss and his subordinate, sending the smaller man flying with a single hit.

“What?!” shouted the boss again.

I was able to follow the newcomer’s movements. But to everyone else there—even Saria and the others—it must’ve looked like the grunt suddenly disappeared. The giant man tightened his grip on his weapon.

“The hell do you think you are?!”

“Fufufu... Hahahaha!”

The newcomer was dressed in a silver skinsuit that spared no details from head to foot, and he had a long red scarf tied around his neck that billowed behind him in the wind. He had thick black gloves on either hand. Slowly, he straightened his pose from how he’d kicked the grunt into space, his smile deepening into a bold grin.

“Who am I, you ask? Allow me to enlighten you! I am the mighty Champion of Justice, One-Hit Gargarand! Don’t you forget it!”

The man—Gargarand-san—struck an explosive pose, and I could practically hear the corny *SHAKEEN* sound effect go off.

So who is this guy?

Al, for some reason, snapped to attention.

“Did he just say One-Hit Gargarand?!”

“Uh, yeah, something like that. You, uh, know him?”

“C’mon, don’t gimme that look!”

I didn’t know what other look to give her, though—she seemed to be friends with a genuine grade-A weirdo.

Then again, I’m technically friends with a half-naked muscle maniac and an avid sadomasochist, so I guess I can’t point fingers.

She gave me a baffled look. “You’re sayin’ you really never heard of Gargarand?”

“Uh, no. Not at all. He kinda looks like another sex maniac.”

All that tight clothing could only mean one thing, and his poses really didn’t make much sense.

Barney-san chuckled. “Ohoho! I suppose he’s still something of an oddity these days.”

“Nah, I’m pretty sure Seiichi’s just a special case.”

“Aw, shucks, Al!”

“That ain’t a compliment!”

She doesn’t have to pretend to be so coy. She can compliment me whenever she likes.

Fortunately, Barney-san explained readily enough.

“Seiichi-kun, that man you see out there is one of the few acting S-Rank adventurers.”

“He what?!”

S-Rank? That guy? Seriously?!

“Now, I understand you might not believe me—but surely, you’ve noticed that there isn’t a single bandit standing, save for the boss himself.”

“Huh?”

I looked out the window again, and sure enough, Barney-san was right.

Since when?

The boss seemed to notice his men were down at the same time.

“I-Impossible! All my men at once?!”

“Mwahahaha! No number of ruffians can compare to justice. The good guy always wins, and nothing will ever change that!”

He puffed out his chest with pride, and I could practically hear the overwrought firework sound effects go off behind him.

I'm not hearing things, am I? I'm gonna die this time for sure; I know it.

"Believe me now?" Barney-san mused.

"Uh... yeah."

It was impossible to deny at this point. There was one key piece of advice that cemented it about all else.

"Even S-Rank adventurers are a bunch of weirdos and perverts, huh..."

"*That's* what convinced you?!" Al snapped back. "Not his power or anything?!"



I remembered hearing from Gustle and Eris-san that all S-Rank adventurers had their start at the Terbelle guild. I'd always thought that all S-Rankers were perverts and weirdos as a result—Gustle and Eris-san were former S-Rank adventurers themselves, after all. I didn't have any proof, but I was positive the tight-clad weirdo was from Guild HQ one way or another.

A low growl from the bandit boss snapped me out of my thoughts.

"Listen here, dipshit! You're gonna regret screwing with the Ravenous Wolves!"

"Hahahaha! You fool! You're nothing more than fodder for my glorious fists of justice. What do I have to fear from the likes of you?"

The bandit cursed under his breath.

To be fair, Gargarand-san's suave attitude would be pretty cool if he wasn't dressed so weirdly.

"No matter!" the adventurer exclaimed as he clenched his fist. "You'll fall prey to my Dirty Knuckle either way!"

Wait, so it is a fist of justice or dirty boxing? I'm confused.

Gargarand-san leapt at the bandit leader. The ruffian drew the sword at his waist to block his blow—but to his surprise, Gargarand-san charged right past him.

"Huh?"

The bandit blinked in surprise but quickly recomposed himself, ready to respond if Gargarand-san tried to attack him from behind.

Barney-san stroked his beard beside me. "Hmm... I suppose I should've expected as much from the leader of the Ravenous Wolves. No wonder they've grown so troublesome."

"Huh? So those bandits are famous or something?"

"You could say that. They've come into the spotlight as of late as one of the fastest-growing bands of thieves in the country. Why? I've heard the guild wants them dead or alive."

Oh, okay... That would also explain why they have so many horses.

As we watched the fight, Gargarand-san suddenly stopped with a grin.

“Hahaha! You’re finished!”

The bandit furrowed his brow in confusion. “... I what?”

I don’t get it, either. What did Gargarand-san do?

Looking around the carriage, Barney-san was the only one who seemed to understand what was going on.

“Allow me to enlighten you—look over there.”

“Huh?”

After a moment’s hesitation, the bandit turned toward the direction Gargarand had pointed in. We also followed his finger, but there was nothing there. Just as I turned back to the scarfed weirdo, though, I found that he’d slipped up into the bandit’s guard and unleashed a vicious uppercut right into the bandit’s jaw.

“Bwahaha! Dirty Knuckle!”

“Gwough?!”

Okay, now that’s playing dirty! Who’d have thought he’d stoop so low for the win?!

Some said that it’s all fair in love and war or something, but something about fighting dirty while going on and on about justice just felt wrong.

Does that mean his whole Dirty Knuckle bit is about using cowardly tricks? I thought it was like, dirty with the blood of the unrighteous or something cool like that!

Nonetheless, that one uppercut was enough to knock the bandit out cold.

Gargarand-san shook his head at his unconscious foe.

“Such naivete! And to think I didn’t even have to use the true power of the Dirty Knuckle—I wear these gloves because I haven’t washed my hands in twenty years!”

“Ugh, gross!”

That’s just foul! Seriously, just wash your hands already! If you showed up on some kid’s Ranger Power show, I’d sue the production company on the spot!

Saria and the others didn’t seem to realize his trick, though—he must’ve been moving too fast for them to see because they were all oohing and ahing.

“That was amazing!” Saria said.

“Damn... He ain’t S-Rank for nothing,” Al muttered.

No, don’t compliment that joke! Oh, if only they’d believe me if I tried to tell them...

Barney-san, on the other hand, chuckled knowingly. “That particular young one is a bit of a special case. He hardly ever fights monsters, instead specializing in fighting people. Most of his targets are bounties or bandits. They call him Absolute Victory Gargarand for that very reason.”

“I have an excellent reason for doing so, of course,” the tight-clad hero remarked as he strolled toward us. He had already bound and gagged the bandit leader, and as he leaned into our carriage, he caught sight of Barney-san. “Ah, Barnabus-sama! It’s been a while.”

The sage nodded cordially. “You seem to be doing well. But come to think of it, I’ve never heard why you fixate on bounties. Would you mind enlightening me?”

“It’s simple—I wanted to be able to punch people legally.”

“‘Champion of Justice,’ my ass!” I blurted out.

That’s a pretty shitty reason, honestly. Is there a single half-decent S-Rank adventurer out there, or are they all jerks and weirdos?

Gargarand-san only gave me a knowing smile. “I consider ‘underhanded’ and ‘cowardly’ to be compliments. History is written by the victors, after all, so my fists carry the spirit of truth and justice for as long as I continue to win, no matter my reasons. Nobody in their right mind would let such a glorious opportunity pass them by.”

Those were the first words I ever exchanged with an active S-Rank adventurer.

I wish they were any other words.

Chapter 3: Instant Farming

“By the way, Barnabus-sama, who are these folks?” Gargarand-san asked, turning to the elderly mage.

“They’re some of the most promising youths I’ve ever encountered. They were gracious enough to accept my invitation, and we’re headed toward the Academy.”

“Is that so?”

He turned to look at the girls and me with newfound interest. My Second Sight told me he was using some kind of Skill to examine us. I was used to people looking at me like that when they used Analysis, so I wasn’t surprised. He seemed somewhat confused when he looked at my Disguised Stats, though.

“Hm? This can’t be right. The aura you’re giving off doesn’t match those Stats in the slightest.”

“What?!”

How can he tell?

He should be seeing the same super-low Stats everyone else did, and I wasn’t exactly putting on airs. Nonetheless, he seemed to get that something was off about me.

Barney-san smiled slyly. “I might add that this gentleman is likely even better with magic than I am.”

Gargarand-san’s eyes widen. “Impossible!”

Well, yeah. Barney-san’s a world-famous mage or something, and I’m just a nobody... wait, what did he say about me?!

I’d have to watch out for Barney-san in the future, given how perceptive he seemed to be, but Gargarand-san seemed every bit as threatening in that respect.

Who'd have thought he could say anything with all that skintight silver? Er... I guess that doesn't matter.

He seemed fully deserving of his S Rank, and my time at Guild HQ had made it clear just how many powerful perverts this world had. If anything, I'd continued to underestimate this world's adventurers because they were so weird, and that was a prejudice I had to shake.

Nothing was wrong with them being as screwed up as they wanted, so long as they didn't bother anybody around them. There was an exception or two—like a certain gentleman who was too much of a lolicon for anyone's good—but that was no reason to discriminate against all perverts. Again, they could do what they wanted—except for maybe Slan-san, the exhibitionist, and Grand-san, the destruction maniac.

Forget not bothering anyone; they're outright menaces to society! There's no covering for those pervs, is there?!

I shook my head. More importantly, I had to figure out if there was even any point in hiding my power at this point. I'd already managed to draw a ton of attention to myself, like wiping out that monster horde almost single-handedly. And somebody had to have noticed the sheer volume of ultra-rare loot that was dropped, thanks to Perfect Loot. The latter probably wasn't a big deal since it sounded like Louisse had cleared tons of high-difficulty dungeons and brought back her share of overpowered rare loot.

Gargarand-san flashed me a fearless smile. "Hm... To think, not even I can see the limits of your heroic strength! You're an interesting one, newbie!"

"Isn't he?" Barney-san agreed.

"Now, as much as I'd love to see your true strength man-to-man, these loathsome villains won't turn themselves in. We'll have to save the fun for another day."

Wait. Me, fight him? I'm glad I dodged that bullet somehow.

He didn't even register my shock, though. "What's your name?"

"Me? Uh, I'm Seiichi."

“Seiichi... I won’t forget you.” With a smile, he left the side of the carriage to grab the mass of bandits that he’d tied together and started dragging them toward Terbelle.

“A real S-Ranker,” Al muttered in disbelief as we watched him leave. “Damn.”

Yeah. Damn.

I thought I’d seen the worst this world had to offer at Guild HQ, but evidently, that was only the tip of the iceberg.

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Five days passed after parting ways with Gargarand-san. We passed by a few villages on our way to the academy. But there wasn’t much to do in the back of the carriage, so it was pretty boring and uneventful overall.

It was then that I finally remembered the Fruits of Evolution in my Item Box. I’d been planning on planting them for ages, but ever since I realized that the Fruits were giant seeds, I could never find a place to do it. Now that I had my practice with Louisse and Florio-san under my belt, I felt pretty sure I could make it work with magic. If I couldn’t find a place to plant the Fruits, I’d have to *make* a place.

It was a crazy idea, but it didn’t seem impossible. After all, I’d evolved out of my humanity for better or worse. Barney-san knew I was good with magic, and Al must’ve figured out I wasn’t just a normal guy by now. It’d probably be fine if I used a bit of overpowered magic. Well, it wouldn’t be *fine*, per se, but I’d probably go unpunished.

I shut my eyes and tried to imagine the spell I wanted to make. I’d need a wide-open space to grow Fruit of Evolution trees and a climate to help them grow. Ideally, they’d also be portable, like big flower pots.

Wait, what am I thinking? A wide-open area that I can carry with me? That makes no sense.

Nonetheless, I was able to envision what I wanted. It didn’t seem realistic, but I couldn’t think of something more feasible now. Deciding to give it a whirl, I stuck out my hand and said the first thing that came to mind.

“Instant Farm.”

Poom!

With that, the exact object I was imagining appeared in my hand. It was like reuniting with an old friend since I’d used this particular tool a lot back in my old world. Still, it was just about the last thing I thought I’d see here.

“You’re kidding,” I muttered.

I had somehow created a smartphone.

I’d been envisioning a phone app where you could raise fruits. That way, it’d be easily portable, and I could have as big a farm as I wanted inside the game.

Still a phone? I made a whole phone with magic here?

As I stared at it dumbfoundedly, the screen lit up with a MENU option. I tapped it, and the next screen read PLEASE HOLD THE CROP YOU WISH TO GROW NEAR THE SCREEN. I obediently pulled Fruit of Evolution out of my Item Box and held it up to the phone. Then, with almost baffling ease, the giant seed was sucked into the far-smaller phone.

Three little mounds of dirt popped up on the screen, and one of them already had a leafy little sprout growing out of it. I tapped the sprout, and a little text box popped out, saying FRUIT OF EVOLUTION. It looked like it’d be a while before the Fruit was ready to harvest, but only enough. There was no prompt to water it or fertilize it or anything. The only button on the screen was the MENU in the corner.

Okay, I need to get this out. What the actual fuck is this?! That motorcycle helmet Sheep-san gave me was one thing. I could overlook Gustle’s speedo, but a literal smartphone’s the last straw! What happened to the fantasy setting?! I guess it’s my fault I imagined a phone, but still! Hold it in a little, me!

I didn’t want to come off as a real weirdo, so I kept myself from yelling out loud.

It was all my stupid magic’s fault for being so versatile. I was still glad I had a free pass to do whatever I wanted, but I couldn’t help feeling bad about the setting.

You've got it rough, world. Welcoming me in like this was a mistake, huh? Sorry.

Since it looked like I could still plant two more things, I decided to try to grow a Special Medicinal Herb and some Revivification Grass.

Special Medicinal Herbs could be used to make Ultimate Healing Potions and had great healing properties on their own, so it couldn't hurt to have some more. I didn't have any seeds, but the app accepted the grass just fine, so it'd probably work the same.

I'd never even touched my Revivification Grass, but I still had the seeds Saria gave me way back. It was useless on monsters, but it could be used to make Soul Nectar, bringing a human back from the dead.

With that, I'd created three little sprouts on my screen. I had no idea how long it'd take to grow them, so I decided to check periodically until something changed. I hesitated just a little about what to do with the smartphone, but as I did so, it vanished into thin air. I found that I could make it appear again just by thinking about it, and I wasn't about to complain about that nifty feature now. I had fully expected to have to explain Instant Farm to the others, but fortunately, none of them seemed to notice it at all.

With that, we continued our peaceful carriage ride until we finally arrived at Barbodel Magic Academy.

Chapter 4: Barbodel Magic Academy

“Welcome, Seiichi-kun, to my humble Barbodel Magic Academy!”

“Whoa...!”

As soon as we arrived at the Academy, I was blown away. I’d gotten a taste of fancy buildings from my time at the palace in Terbelle. But the school looked like a massive castle more than anything else.

This is a school, right? We didn’t get taken to somebody’s fortress by mistake?

Saria and the others seemed equally flummoxed by the sheer size of the building.

Barney-san smiled impishly. “Impressive, isn’t it? This entire region is the independent land of Barbodel. The Academy borrows not only the name but the neutral status of the land it rests on.”

“Wow.”

“You’re no doubt impressed by its size, but remember that we have students from all over the world. We need every bit of the space. We even receive donations from across the continent, giving us a reputation as a school for everyone. Regrettably, those very contributions have been leading to a bit of trouble as of late. Some countries believe that a more generous donation lends their citizens unique privileges—not to mention, of course, trivial class politics and disagreements from the outside world sometimes playing out within our halls. I believe I mentioned this already, but our neutrality is currently being contested.”

One look at his face made it clear how much it was weighing on him. I couldn’t blame him—staying neutral had to be rough work, and any number of things could throw those plans into disarray. There was no way I’d be able to do the same in his shoes.

As he explained everything to us, I picked up on something troubling on my mental radar. I'd left Clairvoyance's Detection function on ever since the bandits' attack. The Skill's Mind's Eye functions were totally passive. But Detection had to be consciously triggered, so I hadn't been using it almost at all. I just didn't have the focus for it. Fortunately, my sparring with Lousse had gotten me more used to multitasking with my Skills. So I decided to keep the Detection function up as much as possible.

I wish I'd thought of this before the bandits attacked us!

I was just a regular guy before eating the Fruits of Evolution, though, so I doubted anyone would chew me out for being a late bloomer—or at least, I hoped they wouldn't.

At any rate, I turned to face the approaching blip to find a young woman walking toward us. She was professionally dressed with a pair of glasses perched on her nose, giving the impression of a capable, confident businesswoman.

Who's that?

Barney-san's confident smile quickly faded into horror. "B-Beatrice-kun!" he stammered.

She gave him a frosty look. "What, pray tell, is your defense this time, Principal?"

"It isn't what it looks like! This is in the best interests of the academy, I swear—"

"Guilty."

"Can't I at least say something in my defense?!"

"Nothing you could say would convince me now. With all due respect, please die."

"Oh, why are you so harsh on this poor old man?"

"I suppose you're right. I've left a wealth of unfinished paperwork on your desk for your enjoyment."

"Er... I believe you're using 'enjoyment' incorrectly, Beatrice-kun."

It was like watching a two-person comedy routine. Then the woman—Beatrice—suddenly turned to face us, but this time there was a distinct warmth in her look.

“My apologies. Might I ask who you are?”

“Allow me to elaborate!” Barney-san said, puffing out his chest.

“Please die.”

“Why are you so cruel, Beatrice-kun?” Nonetheless, he recovered from his shock readily enough and cleared his throat. “These are adventurers that I’ve recruited as instructors for our fair academy. They’re all quite exemplary, and Seiichi-kun, in particular, can likely surpass even me in magical prowess. Altria-kun will join him as an instructor, but Saria-kun and Lulune-kun will become our newest students. Origa-kun will be joining us as a teaching assistant.”

Her eyes opened in shock. “Is that so?”

Barney-san was probably right about my magic regarding the number of different spells I could cast, but I barely had control over most of them. Barney-san was no doubt way better at using the spells he had.

The woman turned to me and bowed elegantly. “I am the homeroom teacher of Class 2-F, Beatrice Lognar.”



“I’m, uh, Seiichi. I guess we’ll be coworkers. It’s nice to meet you.”

“I’m Altria Grem,” Al followed. “I’ll be joining as an instructor, too.”

“Hello! My name is Saria! Um, I’ll be studying here soon. It’s great to meet you!”

“Hmph. I am Lulune! Like Saria-sama, I will be joining as a student. More importantly, where is your so-called ‘cafeteria’?”

“... Origa Karmelia. I’ll be... Seiichi-oniichan’s aide.”

Beatrice-san nodded. “I see. So Seiichi-san and Altria-san will be joining the faculty, Saria-san and Lulune-san will become students, and Origa-san will be Seiichi-san’s classroom aide.”

“Precisely,” Barney-san confirmed. “I’ve seen Saria-kun and Lulune-kun’s talents with my own eyes, so I can promise they’ll be worthy pupils. Oh, and one more thing—I would like to put Seiichi-kun in charge of your class and have you support him as his teaching assistant.”

She gave him a dubious look. “I don’t mind becoming a TA, but... are you certain? Strength alone isn’t enough to lead a class—not that I’m doubting his power, of course.”

“He’ll be more than fine,” Barney-san replied with a chuckle.

“Well, if you say so. After all, you’ll be taking the fall should any difficulties arise.”

“C-Could you be a little less blunt in the future?”

“Of course. Anything for you, Headmaster. However, while there won’t be any difficulties accepting Seiichi-san, Al-san, and Origa-san onto the staff, we can’t simply accept Saria-san and Lulune-san as students. We’ll have to administer some basic entrance examinations.”

“I suppose so. We certainly won’t struggle to take on two more pupils. But in light of the recent political friction, it’s best we treat them as fairly as possible. We wouldn’t want to stir up the hive, so to speak.”

“In that case, I shall fill out their paperwork right away.” She turned to face the two future students. “Do you mind if I ask you some questions first?”

“Of course!”

“I suppose I could suffer a few, yes.”

Who died and made you queen of the donkeys, Lulune? Would it kill you to be a little more polite?

Beatrice-san adjusted her glasses. “I’ll start with you, Saria-san. Do you already know any magic?”

“Yep! I can only use Fire magic, though.”

“I see. Do you have any other means of combat?”

“You bet! Just look at these guns!” She flexed her scrawny human arms.

I’m getting some serious déjà vu...

Beatrice-san was totally silent for a long moment before turning back to Barney-san. “You must be joking, Headmaster.”

“Why blame me?! I’ve nothing to do with this!”

Now I remember.

Back when Saria and I were first registering for our adventurer’s licensing exams at the guild, she’d done the same thing. To be fair, though, it didn’t seem especially likely that a pretty girl like Saria was a good fist-fighter.

Beatrice-san sighed as she turned back to Saria. “Well, I suppose you might truly be adept at hand-to-hand.” With that, she looked over at Lulune. “Might I ask you the same questions, Lulune-san?”

“Magic? Hah! All I need are my kicks!”

“... Headmaster?”

“Stop blaming me for everything!” Barney-san snapped back in exasperation.

I wonder what Florio-san would say if he saw the Great Sage acting like this?

If nothing else, though, we had already succeeded in destroying any credibility Barney-san had at his own Academy.

“I never would’ve imagined,” Beatrice-san breathed in shock.

We had just finished Saria and Lulune’s practical component of the entrance examination at the so-called Combat Grounds. There, the girls’ abilities were gauged in combat against some magically-made golems. Both of them passed in a matter of seconds. Lulune, in particular, took out a few dozen of them with a single kick.

I’ll never mock a donkey again.

Beatrice-san was shocked to see their raw power. So between that and Barney-san’s personal invitation, they were readily accepted as new students. It was still a little dicey as to what the other students would think, but both Barney-san and Beatrice-san seemed to believe the girls were strong enough to warrant being fast-tracked.

“Congratulations on completing your entrance exams,” Beatrice-san said to the two future students. “I’m sure you’ve figured it out already, but you’ve both passed. Now, as for what class you’ll be added to...”

Saria stuck her hand up in the air. “Oh! I wanna be in Seiichi’s class!”

Lulune nodded in agreement. “I must accompany Master as well. It’s imperative that I attend his class.”

“Are you both sure? Class F is the lowest-ranking class we have.”

“No need to worry,” Barney-san reassured her. “As much as the other classes look down on them, Class F are every bit as talented as our other pupils. You should know that better than anyone.”

“Well... I suppose so...”

Something about Barney-san’s comment sounded off, though.

So they’re the worst in the school, but they’re just as good? How’s that supposed to work?

Unfortunately, I wasn't going to be puzzling out the answer to that puzzle anytime soon with my potato of a brain.

Beatrice-san nodded reluctantly. "Very well. You'll both be joining Class F, then."

"Yay!"

"Naturally."

With that, it sounded like Saria and Lulune would be my students.

"Wonderful!" Barney-san cleared his throat again. "Now, I had best be returning to my office. It seems I've plenty of work ahead of me."

Beatrice-san shot him a frosty look. "And you deserve every paper. Where were you evading your duties this time?"

"Er... I had some pressing business in the Kingdom of Windberg, you see..."

"Are you really that stupid? You can't keep espousing equality and neutrality while clearly favoring one country with your actions."

"I... Well, you're right."

"As long as you see the error of your ways. I believe that calls for some extra celebratory paperwork."

Barney-san threw himself down on the ground and began flailing around. "Noooooooo! Anything but more paperwork!!"

Is he really a Transcendant? I'd have thought the Great Sage would act his age.

Having seen him cut through hordes of monsters with his mighty spells made him seem more pathetic now. As I watched, he slowly picked himself up and dragged his feet toward the Academy gates.

"Farewell, Beatrice-kun... I leave everything to you."

"Excellent. I'll say something pleasant at your funeral."

"Did I do something to make you hate me?"

"Of course not. I respect you a great deal—or rather, I respect your strength."

“Oh, I think I may cry. You wouldn’t want to see a poor old man cry, would you?”

“You’re right; I wouldn’t. Please save your tears for your office.”

Barney-san gave her a forlorn look, tears gathering in the corners of his eyes as he shuffled away.

I’ll try to be nicer to him when we meet next.

Beatrice-san turned to address me. “Allow me to handle the rest of your arrival procedure, then. Our first order of business is to secure uniforms for Saria-san and Lulune-san. Follow me.”

With that, we left the training grounds. Once again, I was struck by the sheer size of the Academy. The school I went to back on Earth was pretty big by Japan’s standards, but it seemed like a tiny little shack compared to this absolute labyrinth.

I wonder if any kids get lost?

“One more thing,” Beatrice-san added. “Be careful not to get lost in the hallways. At least a few students get lost every year, and that’s far from an ideal way to lose a child.”

“Wait, lose as in, *lose*?!”

So the kids are just never seen again? That’s horrifying! I knew this place was way too big, but I had no idea it was never-seen-again big!

As I was shuddering with the implications, though, Beatrice-san stopped just in front of one of the doors.

“This is the faculty room. Altria-san, Seiichi-san, you will be starting your shifts here. Saria-san and Lulune-san, you may think of this as a place to receive guidance, both academic and otherwise. You would do well to remember it.”

“Okie-dokie!”

“Now, if you’ll excuse me, please wait here a moment.”

With that, Beatrice-san disappeared into the faculty room, then emerged a few minutes later with a pair of cloth bundles in her arms.

“Saria-san, Lulune-san, these are your official uniforms. I ask that you wear these, starting tomorrow, whenever you’re within the Academy. They’re enchanted to fit you at all times, so rest assured. For you, Seiichi-san and Altria-san, we have no uniform for faculty, so what you’re currently wearing will be sufficient.”

Saria held up her new uniform. “Wow! Look, Seiichi, isn’t this cute?!”

The uniform was primarily white with pink accents, making for a surprisingly cute design.



Sure, it'd look cute when the girls wear it, but do the guys wear something in the same colors? I haven't seen the guys' uniforms yet, but I sure hope they have a different design.

"I'm glad you like them," Beatrice-san commented flatly. "Allow me to show you to the dormitories in which you'll all be living."

Right. I guess if we'll all be students and teachers here, it only makes sense that we'd live on campus.

We left the building and began walking through the field toward our new living quarters.

"The dormitory has two wings, one for men and one for women. Students and teachers live together. Now, I doubt I'll have to remind you. But you are absolutely forbidden from crossing into the wing of the opposite sex—barring emergencies, of course."

"What?!" Lulune looked at her in horror. "How can you say such a thing?! I am Master's faithful knight, and as such, I mustn't leave his side!"

"Did I mention the girls' dorm has wonderful meals?"

"I can live with that."

I sighed. "Yeah, I thought as much."

I was admittedly glad she wouldn't be barging into the boys' dorm, but she was too easily placated with the promise of food. Whatever knighthood meant to her, it clearly didn't match my definition.

Finally, we arrived in front of the girls' dormitory.

"Here we are, ladies. I've already informed them we have new residents, so please just let the dorm mother know your name, and she'll give you your room keys. She'll explain the details to you."

"Got it."

"Bye-bye, Seiichi! See you tomorrow!"

"Um... bye..."

With that, Beatrice-san and I headed off toward the boy's dormitory alone.

How come it's super awkward the second we're alone together?

She didn't treat me anything like she did Barney-san, so I figured this must be how she acted normally.

I shot her a sidelong glance. Her dark blue hair was tied back behind her head, but not in a ponytail. I didn't know what to call the hair-ball thing she had going on, but it made her look like a competent teacher and a real career woman. Her matching indigo eyes were neatly framed by her glasses, which gave her a serious feel—but maybe a bit too serious. Still, she was really pretty, so she was probably popular with her male students. Hopefully, they didn't bother her too much.

Come to think of it, this is my first time seeing glasses here... Heck, I didn't know they even had glasses in this world.

Maybe I'd been staring a little too hard because she seemed to notice I was watching her.

"Is something the matter?"

"Uh, no, sorry. I just haven't seen glasses much."

"I suppose they are rather rare. I've seen plenty of Heroes with them, though."

"R-Really? I never would've guessed."

Now that we were talking, I remembered a question I'd been sitting on for a while.

"Can I ask why you didn't oppose my taking over Class F?"

I couldn't figure out why she'd let it go that easily. She was basically being demoted, and some rando was taking her job. I was really surprised she accepted it at all, honestly.

Her eyes grew wide with shock, but her surprise was quickly replaced with a sad smile.

"I'm afraid I don't have what it takes for them to realize their potential."

"..."

“The other students seem to believe that Class F is something of a dumping ground for the worst students, but they couldn’t be more wrong. Each and every one of them has incredible talents just waiting to be nurtured. Sadly, though, I’ve never been able to nurture them properly. I’ve been their teacher for less than a year, but I can already tell that I can’t teach them how they need it most.”

“...”

“You’re different. The Headmaster himself said so—I had a word with him during the entrance exams, and he said that you’ve even awakened new magical proficiencies in your students. You’re the teacher they truly need, and to that, I’ll do whatever it takes to support you.”

I didn’t even know how to respond to her. To me, teachers had always been unreliable at best. When I was first starting to get bullied back on Earth, I’d gone straight to the teachers for help. They never stepped in to stop the bullies, though. At times, they even seemed to side with my tormentors. No matter how many times I pleaded with them, they never took me seriously, and I was made out to be the real problem. The harder I tried, the worse the bullying became until I had no choice but to stop trusting my teachers altogether. It might not sound like much to others, but it was a big deal to me.

Beatrice-san, though, was different. I had no idea if she was standing up for bullied kids like I’d wanted so long ago. But she genuinely believed in a class everyone else had given up on. I probably wouldn’t have taken her word at face value if I was still in school, but as a fellow teacher, her words seemed completely believable. Despite her devotion, I knew I had to help her, no matter what.

“Beatrice-san, I think I get what you want to do. I can’t say I’ll succeed, but I’ll do everything I can.”

“Well... Thank you very much.”

“I have one condition, though.”

“Hm?” My words seemed to have caught her totally off-guard.

“I’ll need your strength most of all.”

“My strength?”

“Without your dedication to the students and your resolve, I probably wouldn’t be able to do a thing.”

“I’m sure you’re exaggerate—”

“No, I’m not. That’s why I want to forget this whole ‘teaching assistant’ thing. We’ll teach the class together.”

She gave me a look of genuine surprise. I didn’t know how to respond, so I scratched my cheek bashfully.

“I, uh... I guess those are big words for the new guy, huh?”

“N-No, not at all. I’m glad you feel that way.”

I spotted tears starting to form in the corners of her eyes. She wiped them away, then gazed again with a pure determined look.

“I understand, Seiichi-san. We’ll teach Class F together.”

“Great!”

Come to think of it, why am I so moved to help by Beatrice-san’s tears when I just felt sorry to see Barney-san cry? Life’s full of little mysteries.

Chapter 5: Class 2-F

The next day, I headed straight to the faculty room, just like Beatrice-san had told me. I knocked politely before entering, just like I'd done back on Earth. But inside, I found Beatrice-san and the girls waiting for me. Oddly enough, I didn't see a single other teacher.

Saria grinned at me. "Morning, Seiichi!"

"Uh... G-Good morning, everyone."

Saria was wearing the uniform she'd been given, and honestly, I was totally unprepared for how pretty she looked.

When am I going to actually get used to girls? This is getting ridiculous...

She spun around to show off her uniform. "Look! It's super cute, huh?"

The uniform's cute, sure, but it's nothing compared to Saria herself... wait, what am I thinking? I've gotta get a grip and stop simping for her so hard.

Lulune was also dressed in her uniform, but she wore it more casually, giving it a lived-in feel. She perfectly straddled the line between girl and woman, which only made her look better. Origachan and Ai were dressed pretty casually, just like always.

After I'd checked out each of the girls in turn, I composed myself and said hello to Beatrice-san properly.

She nodded. "Good morning, Seiichi-san. I look forward to working with you."

"G-Good morning. I've still got a lot to learn, but I'll do what I can."

That's an okay way to start off, right? I've never had a job before, so I don't know how formal I should be with her.

"Well, now that you're here, I'd best show you to your classroom."

As Beatrice-san moved to lead us to class, Al hesitantly raised her hand. “Uh... What do I do?”

“Ah, of course. As you’ll be teaching a more specialized topic, there’s no particular classroom you need to be in now. Instead, you’ll have to introduce yourself to each new class as you begin teaching. I trust you’ve taken a look at the timetable I gave you yesterday?”

“Right. Yeah, I have.”

Timetable? I didn’t get one of those. Oh, well, I’m only a homeroom teacher. It’s not like I need to know what happens when. Ha, that’s funny.

“Uh, Beatrice-san? I didn’t get a timetable.”

“I’m sorry, it seems I forgot to explain. As a homeroom teacher, you won’t be tasked with any specialized classes. But rather, you’ll be teaching a given class all their basic lessons.”

“Basic lessons?”

“Yes. We refer to it as Composite Abilities. In it, you’ll be taking the techniques taught in the Adventuring, Magics, and Combat classes to reinforce when and how to use their abilities. It takes place at the last period of every day and serves as a summary of the day’s lessons.”

“Okay, I think I get it.”

“As you’ll only be teaching Composite Abilities, which is always at the end of the day, there’s simply no need to give you a timetable.”

“Great. Sounds easy enough.”

“Class F, however, is a bit of a special case.”

“Huh?”

So I’m going to be teaching extra classes or something?

“As Class F is something of a black sheep in the Academy, some teachers insist that instructing them is a waste of time. Even outside the school, a significant number of nobles are opposed to the idea of having their students receive relatively less attention on account of the school’s ‘rejects.’”

“What are you getting at?”

“Essentially, as Class F’s teacher, you will be in charge of all their lessons.”

The hell is up with this place? So some teachers think they’re too good for Class F? Teaching them is a ‘waste of time’? I get that time is precious, but it wouldn’t kill them to think about the other kids. Hell, how can a teacher refuse to teach like that?

Teachers had rights like anyone else, and I could understand if the students were abusing the teacher or something. Skipping class because the students weren’t good enough didn’t seem right to me. It’d make a little more sense if the teachers’ salaries were based on the students’ grades or something. But even then, it’d only deepen the gap between Class F and the other kids, which wasn’t fair.

How am I supposed to teach kids everything, though? Forget a teaching license; I never graduated high school! I’m especially bad at English! Er, wait, I guess this world doesn’t have English at all. Lucky kids!

“I get what I’m supposed to do,” I started hesitantly, “but I’m pretty sure I can’t teach all that in one day.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be there to support you. All I ask is that you handle Adventuring, Magics, Combat, and Composite Abilities in Altria-san’s stead.”

“Oh, okay. I think I can manage that.”

Good thing she didn’t add Math or History to that mix, or else I’d be dead. I mean, calculus? Hahahaha, nope!

Since I’d be going to school every day for four different classes, Beatrice-san didn’t think I needed a timetable.

I’ll ask her for one, just in case. It couldn’t hurt.

Beatrice-san gave me a piteous look. “My apologies for the confusion.” With that, she turned to face Al. “If you don’t mind, Altria-san, could I ask you to confirm your timetable for today?”

“Yeah. It says I don’t have any classes today.”

“Very well. In that case, you’ve nothing to do for today, and as you’re here on invitation from the Headmaster, you’ve no paperwork to fill out, either.”

“So what am I supposed to do?”

“Well, most teachers in your position either return home or browse the various boutiques on the grounds. Some of them truly let loose and enjoy themselves.”

I didn’t notice any stalls or anything during our little tour yesterday, but I didn’t doubt her. From how she talked, it sounded like there was some decent entertainment nearby, too.

If the teachers have time to party during school hours, it won’t kill them to actually teach Class F!

Al thought for a moment. “If I’m free, does that mean I can go check out Class 2-F with you guys?”

“Class F? I don’t mind, but—”

“Great! I’m going with you guys, then.” Al turned to face me and chuckled. “I can’t wait to see you teach, Seiichi-sensei!”

Well, this just got harder. Yay.

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“Saria-san, Lulune-san, please follow me into the classroom. Seiichi-san and Origa-chan, I’ll call you when I’m ready for you, so kindly wait outside until then.”

With that, Beatrice-san led Saria and Lulune into the class, with Al tagging along behind them.

After our conversation in the faculty room, we moved right to Class 2-F’s room. Surprisingly, it wasn’t in the main school building. Instead of being located in the palatial building that housed all the other classrooms, Class 2-F was in the beaten-down old school building. Barney-s and Beatrice-san were apparently trying to move the classroom into the Academy proper and put the creaky old building out of its misery. But the top brass of countries across the

land hated the idea of letting a bunch of failures study in the same building as their kids.

Seriously, what's their problem? It's not like failure's contagious.

The whole Class F issue was apparently one of the reasons the Academy's neutrality was being questioned. However, I couldn't guess why the adults in charge decided to fixate on something so idiotic.

My thoughts were interrupted by a round of cheers and hollering from inside the classroom. They must be ecstatic to have Saria and Lulune joining them. They were both beautiful, making them both instant hits with the guys, and Saria, in particular, would have no problem making friends with the girls.

"... Finally, I would like to introduce someone who will be taking my place as your primary teacher."

When I heard Beatrice-san say that, a different kind of commotion rose from within the class. I wasn't surprised—such sudden teacher changes had to be pretty rare, even in this world. They had to be curious.

"Seiichi-san, please step inside."

I guess that's the signal. Man, I'm starting to get nervous... Origa-chan'll be right behind me, right?

I took a few deep breaths. "Okay... Are you ready, Origa-chan?"

She gave me a thumbs-up. "Mm... I'll be fine."

With that, I slid the classroom door open.



Clatter-clatter!

“Who’re you?”

Slam!

I slammed the door shut as quickly as I slid it open.

That’s funny... I could’ve sworn I saw a kid with a killer pompadour glaring at me. No, that’s impossible. I’m imagining things!

I took another deep breath and slid the door open again.

Clatter-clatter!

“I said, who the hell are you?”

Slam!

...

I guess I wasn’t imagining anything, huh. Why am I getting sworn at already? We haven’t even met, so why is that kid being so hostile?

Before I had a chance to gather my thoughts, though, the door flew open to reveal the pompadoured kid.

“Hey, asshat! Don’t fuckin’ ignore—”

“Agnos-kun?” came Beatrice-san’s voice from behind him.

“Er, let’s be best buds, man!”

He quickly wrapped his arm around my shoulder, and I could tell from the quiver in his voice that he was sweating bullets.

Beatrice-san isn’t that scary, is she?

Before I could say a thing, she brought the corner of the class roster down on the punk’s head.

“Owwwwwww!! C-Come on, Beatrice, man, not the corner!”

“He is *not* your ‘best bud,’ Agnos-kun. He’s your new homeroom teacher.”

“Huh?! You tellin’ me this creep-o is our new teach?”

“Teach’?”

“I-I mean, teacher!”

I take it back. She’s terrifying.

After ensuring the pompadour backed off, Beatrice-san gave me an apologetic look.

“I’m so sorry about that. I’m afraid he’s a bit of a troublemaker.”

“No, uh, I don’t mind.”

“Thank you for understanding. Now please, come in.”

I hesitated for a moment, wondering if I should leave the pompadour kid curled up in the hallway like that. But my gut was telling me to ignore him, so I followed Beatrice-san’s instructions.

The inside of the classroom was absolute chaos. One boy was smiling abashedly as he tried to make himself look as small as possible in the corner. Another was sprawling out of his desk as if he ran the whole Academy, and a third boy seemed serious enough—except for the oddly cute bear-shaped hat on his head. As for the girls, one was sitting on the windowsill, giving off strong, unapproachable vibes. A second girl looked so sweet and fluffy that I could feel a cavity coming on, and a third one was staring into her reflection in a mirror like a girl possessed. The last student was hard to spot at first—she was squarely under the heel of Lulune’s boot, but she kept desperately trying to crawl closer to Saria.

...

I knew it’d be full of weirdos! Is there anyone normal in this world at all?! If there’s anyone normal here, then I’ve never met them!

Beatrice-san was moving right along in our introductions, of course.

“Allow me to introduce your new homeroom teacher Seiichi-san and his helper Origa-chan.”

“Uh... It’s nice to meet you all. I’m probably the same age as most of you, but I’ll teach you everything I can.”

“... Nice to meet you,” Origa-chan echoed.

Technically speaking, I should be a student along with the rest of them, at least age-wise. I wouldn't be surprised if a student or two took offense to my teaching them and tried to confront me like the pompadour kid had.

"Excellent," Beatrice-san said with a nod. "Agnos-kun, could you start us off with your introduction?"

He popped up from where he'd been lying on the ground to give me an energetic thumbs-up.

"You got it! I'm Agnos Pashen! I dunno why you're our teacher now or nothin', but nice to meet ya!"

Aside from his giant blue pompadour, Agnos was wearing a long black coat, and his pants rode low on his waist. He looked just like an old-school delinquent from Japan. His resting glare wasn't helping his case, either, but maybe because of the comically large bump on his head, he didn't seem threatening in the slightest.

After Agnos took his seat, the flashy, prince-like boy opened his mouth.

"I am Blud Ief Kaizell. I'll let you speak as casually as you did exactly once. I won't remind you again."

"You wait the what ?!"

Blud has striking platinum-blond hair that fell loosely around his shoulders and ocean-blue eyes. Just one look at the way he crossed his legs made it clear that he was a blueblood, and he knew it. That wasn't what surprised me, though.

"Did you say Kaizell?!"

"Hmph... Of course, you would notice that. Yes, I am the Second Prince of the Kaizell Empire—not that such status matters in this school, I suppose."

Wow... Small world. I'd love to ask him a thing or two about his homeland when I get the chance.

Noticing that Blud had finished, the next one—the boy with the bear on his head—was next. He was one of the first kids to attract my attention, and I was curious as to what he had to say.

Instead of talking, he held his sketchbook up so I could see it. It read *Berard Rutra. Nice to meet you.*

Wait, he doesn't talk?! He sure doesn't look like the speechless type!

Aside from the cute stuffed bear on his head, Berard had a coat in Agnos' same style but much shorter and had similarly low-riding pants. It was also a delinquent style, to be sure, but an older one. I could also see his muscles bulging out from beneath his sleeves.

What a mismatch.

It was finally time for the last of the guys to introduce himself—the terrified boy in the corner—but he didn't seem interested in talking at all.

"Leon-kun?" Beatrice-san prodded him. "Could you please introduce yourself?"

"M-Me? Introduce myself? I-I could never! Just the thought of it is s-so shameless... I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry, I can't do it! I'm sorry for wasting your time! I-I'm sorry for saying anything at all!!"

The kid needs a doctor, stat.

Beatrice-san eventually introduced him to me as Leon Hardie, and it was clear he was a coward with a gloomy disposition. Just talking to him made him sweat bullets and half of what he said was apologies. I honestly didn't know what to do with that. Even though he came off as a little gloomy, his cream-colored hair was set in soft waves, and he had chestnut eyes. He was small for his age but decently handsome overall.

That was the end of the guys' introductions, and I already felt ready to check out.

Interestingly enough, I noticed that only Agnos and Berard were wearing different uniforms from the others. Blud and Leon's uniforms were similar to the girls' but in different colors. Obviously, I assumed that Agnos and Berard were using non-regulation uniforms.

I'm glad the guys get different colors after all. I wonder if Agnos and Berard get in trouble for dressing differently?

I didn't get to think for long because it was already time for the girls' introductions.

First up was the girl sitting on the windowsill.

She cast me a quick glance. "Helen Rosa"

Wait, that's it?! She didn't even look me in the eye!

Helen had brown hair done up in... what was the style called? Half-up pigtails? At any rate, she was a pretty girl with slanted eyes that framed chestnut irises. She was wearing the same uniform as Saria, so I assumed they were the same age, but she looked more mature than anyone else.

After Helen finished, it was the spacey girl's turn to talk.

"Me? I'm Rachel Matten~! It's super-duper nice to meet you, Mr. Teacher Man~!"

She wore her silver hair in loose, flowing waves and had big, violet eyes. At the risk of sounding crude, she had a very... *healthy-looking* body.

Next up was the girl who still couldn't seem to pry her eyes off her reflection.

"I'm Irene Prime. Nice to meet you, Seiichi-sensei."

Wow, a normal introduction for once.

Irene was, beyond any shadow of a doubt, gorgeous. She had long pearl-pink hair and matching eyes. It was hard to see her as anything more than a narcissist when she was staring down at her mirror. But when she looked around and talked like a normal person, anyone would understand why she spent so much time looking in the mirror.

She's surprisingly norm—

She sighed dramatically as she looked back into her hand mirror. "Oh, why must I be so beautiful?"

I take it all back.

Ignoring the oddly sensual undertone to her sigh, I was genuinely impressed she was so totally obsessed with herself. I could never.

One way or another, though, that only left one last student—the one who Lulune was stomping.

“P-Please, be my friend...!” she moaned.

“Stay away from Saria-sama!”

“Wow, I can see your panties from down here, Lulune-san!”

“Forget her. Stay away from *me*!”

Beatrice-san shook her head, rubbing her temples from an apparent headache. “Flora-san? What do you think you’re doing?”

Flora looked back at us grimly. “There are cute girls in the room. It’d be rude to not say hello, right? Anyways...” She turned back to Saria. “C’mon, little lady, what’s wrong? I won’t hurt you! I just want a little feel... gehehehe!”

“Flora-san, keep such unsightly laughter to yourself. Are you a girl, or aren’t you?” Beatrice-san sighed and turned to me. “Her name is Flora Redrant. As you can see, she’s a little... eccentric.”

“Hahaha! Hey, new teacher! I know what it looks like, but I just like cute girls. I don’t like them, y’know? Glad you get me!” She immediately whipped back to Saria, unphased by Lulune’s kicks. “C’mon, pleeeeeeease? Just one little, tiny touch?”

“Shut your mouth, villain!” Lulune shouted as she proceeded to grind Flora’s skull with her heel.

Flora had short, wine-red hair that covered her right eye in such a way that I might expect her to have some sort of edgelord-tier seal there. Her visible eye was the same shade of red as her hair, and overall she had the same sort of androgynous beauty that Claudia-san from the Swordsaint Valkyries did. Unfortunately, any charm she might’ve had was undone by the almost comically horny look on her face.

Surprisingly, it looked like Lulune was actually getting worn down. However, Saria still didn’t seem to understand the meaning behind their exchange. Flora was fervently trying to grope her way along the ground toward Saria. But

Lulune was keeping her immobilized for the time being, so it looked like Saria was safe.

Lulune running out of steam is one thing, but she's actually acting remotely honorable. Is it wrong of me to be genuinely shocked by that?

"At any rate," Beatrice-san concluded, "that's everyone in Class 2-F."

Okay, cool beans.

I thought I was finally free from the perverse hell the Guild had locked me in, but apparently, the weirdos were far from done with me.

I crossed my arms composedly and nodded several times in understanding.

"Somebody, anybody, save me."

Chapter 6: Introductions

“Well then, now that we have our self-introductions out of the way, I’d like to return your herbology tests. I’ll call your names one by one, so please come to the front to accept them.”

After the class had calmed down a little bit after the introductions, Beatrice-san produced a stack of papers from within her bag. She was the main teacher for the test, so it only made sense that she’d be the one to hand back everyone’s papers.

“Agnos-kun?”

“Hoo-rah! ‘Course I got the best grades in the—”

“You get a zero.”

“WHAAAAAAT?! I mean, c’mon, why’re you tellin’ the whole class what I got like that?!”

I felt a little bad for him, too, but more than that, I was confused as to why he was so confident when he clearly didn’t know anything about herbology.

Beatrice-san knitted her brow disapprovingly. “How did you expect to do with such nonsensical answers?”

“It ain’t nonsense!”

“Tell me how you make an Intermediate Healing Potion, then.”

“Fighting spirit!”

“You can’t be serious.”

Wait, really?

I glanced over Beatrice-san’s shoulder to find he’d written ‘fighting spirit’ in literally every blank.

Seriously, what was he thinking?! There’s muscleheads, and then there’s this!

“I ain’t wrong! With enough spirit, you can do anythin’! Guts can do anything!”

“I see. In that case, use your ‘fighting spirit’ to lick your own eyebrows.”

“Sorry for making shit up!”

That was quick! Where did all his fighting spirit go?!

With that, Agnos sullenly returned to his desk. I almost felt bad for him.

Beatrice-san grabbed the next paper from her pile. “Next, Blud-kun.”

“Hmph,” he snorted haughtily as he elegantly strode to the front of the class.

“You scored very well. Keep up the good work.”

“Naturally. I don’t need the likes of you to tell me.”

Agnos slammed his desk with his fists. “How come he did well, but I didn’t?! That ain’t fair!”

Blud raised an eyebrow. “Are you as stupid as you look? Your ‘answers’ barely qualified as such. It’s no wonder you failed.”

“Nah, that ain’t it! I didn’t put in enough fighting spirit... yeah, that’s it!”

Beatrice-san adjusted her glasses. “Very well, Agnos-kun. Prove your newfound spirit by running nude into the palace of your choice.”

“Sorry,” he obediently muttered.

I’m just not going to mention that there’s a guy at the Terbelle guild who would actually do that.

Next up was Berard, and he silently accepted his test without so much as a peep before sitting right back at his desk. I only caught a glimpse of his paper, but it looked like he scored a whopping 90%.

The mysteries never end with that kid, do they?

When I saw the next test, Leon’s, my jaw dropped.

“Huh?! ”

Beatrice-san sighed. “He did it again, I see. Rest assured, this is normal for him.”

“Normal?!”

I took another baffled look at his paper.

Nah, this can't be right.

“Leon-kun! Can't you answer even a single question at all?”

“I'm sorry! I'm so, so sorry! B-But you can't really expect a worthless waste of flesh like me to sully that paper, can you? Just looking at my writing makes you sick, doesn't it? Oh, I knew I still messed up! I'm sorry! Please forgive me for being such a miserable eyesore! O-Oh, dear, I just talked back to you, didn't I?! I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I'll shut up, I promise!”

His test didn't have a single answer on it. Instead, he wrote *I wouldn't dare share my miserable thoughts with you! I'm so sorry you have to read this. Oh, no, I'm still writing, aren't I? I'm making you sicker with every letter, aren't I?! I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry*—his apologies covered every inch of the paper.

Holy shit, this is actually insane! This is more than just regular pessimism. I'm surprised he even made it to the classroom at all! I'm surprised he's made it as long as he has without thinking about suicide or something... that's no joke.

Even back on Earth, I never felt that depressed. It didn't make sense to me that the person who was bullied would have to die. That was basically giving in to the jerks. I didn't care how rough life got; suicide was never an option. Besides, somebody was always bound to have it worse, and I swore to never even kid about that shit.

My reasons aside, though, I was equally curious and terrified as to what was going on in the poor kid's head.

Hang in there, bud.

After that, Rachel and Helen took their tests from Beatrice-san, and they both scored solidly in the 90s, so there wasn't much to worry about there. Even though Helen still seemed unapproachable, Rachel was practically perfect, so the class seemed to be in solid shape overall.

Wait, what am I saying?! Two normal kids don't make their classmates any more normal! Damn, I almost got used to all these oddballs. I can just imagine those freaks at the Guild smirking at me now!

I hurriedly tried to forget about that pack of perverts as I watched Irene accept her test from the front. Her regal steps were almost too composed.

“Here you are, Irene-san. Another perfect test.”

“Thank you most kindly—but honestly, did anyone doubt I would be perfect?”

From the smile on her face, she wasn't boasting—she honestly believed her every word. When I looked at her test, it really was perfect, and the way she was acting seemed to imply she got perfect grades every time.

Wait, why is she here, then?

She didn't seem to fit the underachieving reputation of Class 2-F—and neither did Berard or Blud, come to think of it.

“Finally, your test, Flora-san.”

“Yes!” She'd escaped from under Lulune's heel at some point and made for the front of the class.

“It was okay.”

“Oof! That kinda hurts, you know!”

So does she see 'weirdo' as a compliment or something? That's it; she's a lost cause.

Once everyone had their tests, Beatrice-san turned to address me.

“Well then, Seiichi-san, on to today's agenda. Why don't we devote the rest of our time to demonstrating everyone's strengths to you?”

“By 'everyone,' you just mean the kids in this class, right?”

“Yes. With their herbology exams finished and returned, their book studies have hit an optimal pausing point. As you'll be overseeing their practical courses, I believe it would be best if you take the rest of the day to see where everyone is in that regard.”

“Okay. If you’re sure it’s okay to put their other classes on pause, I don’t mind taking a look.”

I had no idea where they were course-wise, so it only made sense to let Beatrice-san decide.

She turned to face the class.

“Well then, class. As I’m sure you’ve all heard, Seiichi-san will be taking over your instruction for the rest of the day, and we’ll be moving to the training ground presently. I trust you’ll take this opportunity to get to know each other better.”

“Yeah!!” Agnos pumped his fists enthusiastically. “No studying rules!”

That’s not surprising. I’m not a big fan of studying, myself.

There were plenty of kids out there who’d no doubt love a shot at studying at Barbodel, though, so it was probably an unpopular opinion.

Under any other circumstances, though, I sure wouldn’t want to ‘get to know anyone’ in the training grounds... sounds a little rough.

“In that case,” Beatrice-san continued, “please be at the training grounds by the beginning of the first period. As other classes may also be using the grounds, make sure not to cause any trouble.”

“Okay,” everyone replied unenthusiastically.

With that, everyone began filtering out of the classroom. Al followed Saria and Lulune out, leaving me alone with Beatrice-san and Origa-chan.

“Uh, Beatrice-san? Can I ask you something?”

“Of course. What is it?”

“I’d really appreciate it if I could have a timetable at some point.”

“Ah, of course. I’m sorry I assumed. Even if you’ll be coming here every day, you’d of course want to know which class starts and ends when. My apologies.”

“No, it’s not a big deal. Don’t worry about it.”

“Thank you. Shall we stop by the faculty room on the way?”

“Sure.” I turned to Origa-chan. “So what do you wanna do? Are you gonna head to the training ground first?”

She shook her head. “No... We’ll go together.”

“Oh, okay.”

“Besides...”

“Hm?”

“... I don’t know the way.”

Right. Of course.

The academy was so huge that they couldn’t possibly be using every room. I was pretty sure I couldn’t even find my way back to the guys’ dorm alone, and Perfect Recollection showed no signs of bailing me out.

Is that Skill still working, even?

Nonetheless, we both decided to follow Beatrice-san’s lead toward the training grounds.

Chapter 7: Unease

After exiting Seiichi's class, the students of Class 2-F made their way down the corridor toward the training grounds.

"The hell is that Seiichi guy, anyways?" Agnos grumbled. "He didn't even blink when I glared at him."

Blud arched his brow. "That would be because you're as intimidating as a field mouse."

"What'd you say?!"

"Stop your braying. Have you no shame?"

"You tryin' ta pick a fight? Huh?! Are ya?!"

"U-Um, please don't fight!" Leon stammered. "O-Oh, dear, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to share my lowly opinion so easily... I'm so, so sorry!"

Both Agnos and Blud stopped their bickering to turn and sigh at Leon.

"Seriously? That shit again?"

"Can't you fix that self-deprecation issue of yours? It's simply pitiful. As if anyone would yell at you for merely stating your opinion."

"I'm so sorry! I can't believe I made you worry about me... I promise I'll never, ever let it happen again!"

I suppose it couldn't possibly be that easy, Blud thought as he let out a heavy sigh.

"To return to the topic at hand, I can't make heads or tails of our new homeroom teacher, either. If we can't even see his face with that tacky hood in the way, how should we know if he's qualified to teach us?"

Agnos snorted. "Yeah. I guess we'll figure that out soon enough, though. We'll be spending the rest of the day on practical stuff or somethin', right?"

Blud nodded thoughtfully. “Indeed. What’s your take on him, Berard?”

Berard dutifully took out his sketchbook and showed it to the others.

I think he’s nice.

“Nice?” Blud scoffed. “You never change, do you?”

Meanwhile, a short distance away, Flora was desperately trying to talk to Saria and Lulune.

“Hey, so Saria-san, Lulune-san? Do you know each other or something? C’mon, spill!”

“Yep!” Saria replied cheerily. “I know Lulune-chan, and Al, and Origa-chan, and even Seiichi!”

She blinked back in surprise. “Huh?”

Having overheard Saria’s claim, the other classmates eagerly turned to hear. Only Berard was unphased by her reveal.

“U-Uh... So how do you know him?” Flora asked uneasily.

Saria grinned. “I’m his wife!”

“You WHAAAAAAT?!”

“And I, Lulune, am his dogged underling!”

“UNDERLING?!”

“And guess what? Al’s his lover, too!”

“HUHHHH?!”

Flora had never been so shocked in her life. Worse, from how Al blushed at the mention of her name, everything Saria said had to be the truth. None of them even tried to deny it.

“Uh... What about Origa-chan? She’s really young, right? How does she know him?”

“Oh, her? She’s Seiichi’s little sister!”

“Thank God, only his sister! Yeah, I was thinking she looked a little too young for the law.”

Had Seiichi been there, he undoubtedly would've wanted a certain lolicon back at the guild to hear those words.

Blud only stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I see... the plot thickens."

"... ki..."

"Hm?"

He turned to face Agnos, who was muttering something under his breath. Suddenly, the delinquent raised his head and began to shout.

"He's my new aniki! I knew there was somethin' special about him! Yeah, he's a man's man!"

"Er... I see."

I don't envy our new teacher in the slightest, Blud thought.

"Wow," Rachel said with a spacey shake of her head. "He's really something, huh?"

Irene nodded. "He at least has enough power to be worthy of his three wives—especially considering that each of them is nearly as beautiful as I am."

It wasn't uncommon for especially powerful, influential people to have multiple husbands or wives, primarily to produce as many heirs as possible. Polygamy had long been legal for that very reason. If Seiichi had three wives, he had to be physically or politically powerful.

It was then that Helen approached Saria for the first time. She had always been somewhat of a recluse, so the others were surprised to see her being so proactive.

"Hm? What's up?" Saria asked.

"... You're really that guy's lovers?"

"Yep, we sure are!"

"So he's strong, then?"

Saria blinked in surprise at the sudden non-sequitur but regained her grin a moment later. "He's super-duper strong!"

“Is that so?” she muttered to herself.

With that, Helen retreated back a safe distance from the others. Saria still had no idea what the other girl wanted. But she continued chatting with and getting to know her other classmates nonetheless.

When they arrived at the training grounds, they found a few dozen other students were already there. It seemed they weren’t the only class hoping to use the field. As soon as they noticed Class F, the other class began to whisper amongst each other uneasily.

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

Irene put a hand through her hair and sighed dramatically. “They must be smitten by my good looks—not that I blame them.”

“Really? Wow!”

“As if!” Flora cut in to correct her. “Don’t believe everything you hear, okay, sweetie? We’re, uh... kind of the worst students in the whole school, and they know it.”

“The worst?” Saria cocked her head to the side curiously. “I don’t believe that. Everyone’s special in their own way. There’s no point in thinking some people are better than others.”

Just as she said so, however, a small posse of students led by a blonde-haired youth approached them.

“What are the dropouts doing here?” the leader sneered. “Don’t tell me I’m supposed to breathe the same air as you freaks?”

Class F naturally had its enemies, and being approached like that was nothing out of the ordinary. Blud, however, paled at the sight of them.

“B-Brother?!” he stuttered. “I thought you were studying at the Leyll Academy back home! What are you doing here?!”

The sight of his little brother’s panic only deepened the sneer on his face. He was Theobolt tera Kaizell, First Prince of the Kaizell Empire and Blud’s half-brother.

“Oh, Blud. Why am I not surprised to see you with these rejects?”

“Kh...!”

Blud could only grit his teeth in frustration.

“Hey, piss-breath!” Agnos growled. “What d’you think you’re sayin’? You tryin’ ta pick a fight?!”

“Enough, Agnos! Don’t provoke him!” Blud snapped.

“That jerk-off started it! I can’t sit and let him insult us!”

Theobolt raised an eyebrow. “Weak *and* barbaric, I see. You’re beyond saving, all of you.”

“Just try an’ say that again!”

Agnos lunged forward to slug the prince, but Blud held him back at the last moment. Even Berard stepped in to restrain Agnos.

“Hah!” Theobolt spit at them. “How uncouth. This is exactly why I didn’t want to come to this dump of a school. Father and Helio insisted I come with the heroes, though, so I suppose I had little choice. Now, though, I’m almost grateful. Finally, I can show vermin the world over just how superior I truly am!”

“That’s right, Theobolt-sama!” hooted one of his goons.

“You’re a genius!” hollered another.

The First Prince nodded contentedly at a job well done, but just then, he spotted Saria.

“Oh? It seems there’s a rather fetching diamond in the rough.”

“Huh?”

Saria didn’t even seem to notice the rapacious look he was giving her, but Lulune readily stepped in to cover her.

“Stand back, cur.”

“Well, looks like there’s two beauties! Splendid. Tell me, what are your names?”

“Me? I’m Saria!”

Theobolt smirked. “Rejoice, maggots! I’ll grant you both the privilege of being my women. You may grovel before me now.”

From the look on his face, he clearly wasn’t expecting to be turned down—but Saria immediately bowed her head in apology.

“I’m sorry!” she announced, still beaming. “I love Seiichi, not you.”

He stared at her in genuine confusion for a long moment, his jaw hanging open dumbly.

“I must’ve misheard you. It sounded as though you actually turned me down—”

“Sorry! I love Seiichi!” she repeated innocently.

His lips curled into a frown. “You misunderstand. I just gave you permission to be *my* woman. Me, heir to the vast Kaizell Empire, the most beautiful man alive, and a genius with both pen and blade. No man could possibly be my eq—”

“Huh? What’re you saying? Seiichi’s waaaaaaay more handsome than you, and he’s a zillion times stronger, too!”

Lulune shook her head at Saria sadly. “Give it up, Saria-sama. That ignorant wretch has never met Master.”

Theobolt’s pride was in utter tatters. He wouldn’t have been fazed if they had turned him down out of deference to his awesomeness or fear of other women’s jealousy. Between Saria’s innocent refusal and Lulune’s abject pity, however, there was no way for him to rationalize his rejection.

“Gyahahahaha!” Agnos burst out laughing. “He was talkin’ like such a big shot, but he got shot down in a second! ‘I’ll grant you the privilege of being my women?’ An’ she doesn’t even give a damn about him! Hahahahahaha!”

Blud frantically tried to hold in his laughter. “N-Now, Agnos, try not to make a fool of my... pfft... big brother. I’m sure he’s trying.”

Berard scrawled something on his notepad and held it up so Theobolt could see it. *Don’t worry. Everyone has off days.*

Between his sheer rage and embarrassment, Theobolt’s cheeks turned a bruised shade of reddish purple.

Finally, Altria rolled her eyes. “Y’know, Beatrice-san said the teachers ain’t supposed to buy into student affairs, but you’d better stop bothering those two. I ain’t gonna sit back and watch that.”

“And who the *fuck* do you think you are?!” Theobolt snapped at her.

“Me? I’ll be teaching Adventuring here. I bet I’ll teach your class sooner or later.”

He snorted, shooting a dark look first at her, then at the rest of Class 2-F. “You think being an adventurer, of all things, makes you better than *me*?”

“What was that?”

“I’m an elite, the best of the best! Don’t you dare think your insults will go unpunished! You worthless cretins can’t even use magic. You’ll die in the same miserable obscurity you were born in!”

None of them said a word.

“I’m right, aren’t I?” he sneered. “Of course I am. You know you’ll never amount to anything, ever. Why, I’d call that your only good point!”

Before he could continue; however, a voice from beside them cut him off.

“Who knew the future Emperor-King of Kaizell had so much time on his hands.”

A young blonde man strode between the two parties, separating them from each other.

“Robert Iroath Windberg!” Theobolt muttered as though the name were a curse. “You’ve got nothing to do with this. Butt out!”

“What, so you have no intent on attending class? I suppose you’re right; that isn’t any of my business. I couldn’t care less if you fail.”

“Idiot. The S-Rank teachers here are of the Kaizellian nobility. They’d gladly overlook one little disdemeanor.”

“I’m afraid you’re the idiot, Theobolt. You’re sorely mistaken if you think you can abuse your authority here.”

“Hah! Spoken like a real small-fry aristocrat! Looks like someone’s jealous! Where’s your shame?!”

Robert let out a heavy sigh. “I’m so tired of arguing with you. I’d avoid you altogether if only you’d behave yourself.”

“The hell’d you say to me?”

“Enough, I’m done with this farce. I’m getting back to class, and if you know what’s good for you, you’ll do the same.”

“Who do you think I am?!”

Robert didn’t reply to Theobolt’s provocations, however, and instead turned right back where he came from to rejoin his class. The Kaizellian prince glared after him, then whipped back to face Class F.

“Fine... Saria, was it? I won’t forget this. Let’s go.”

With that, he spun about and stalked away.

“W-Wait up, Theobolt-sama!” cried his goons.

As they were leaving, however, one of them turned back to glare at Leon.

“Hmph!”

Leon immediately tensed up in horror, prompting a bout of cruel laughter from the boys before they hurried to catch up with their leader.

With that, Class 2-F was alone once again.

Blud turned to his classmates and bowed deeply. “I’m so sorry for that trouble.”

The last thing any of them was expecting was an apology. None of them could say a thing.

“I feel horrible for what he said to you,” Blud continued, turning to Saria and Lulune. “Please forgive me for his indecency.”

“No worries, I’m fine!” Saria replied cheerily.

“Likewise, I thought nothing of it.”

Hesitantly, he nodded. “Thank you. I swear that if he tries anything untoward, I’ll be the first to lend you my aid.”

“Pfft,” Agnos snorted moodily. “Quit bowin’ and scrapin’. Your asshat brother owes us, not you.”

Exactly, read Berard’s sketchbook. We’re fine.

“I-I-I’m okay, too!” Leon stammered, nodding his head frantically.

Flora smiled thinly. “He sure has a nasty way with words, but it’s not like you insulted us or anything. Don’t sweat it, really.”

“That’s right,” Rachel chimed in. “He was a bad guy, but he didn’t do anything to really hurt us—”

Their words brought a bit of a smile to Blud’s face, but he nonetheless bowed to Irene and Helen in apology. “I’m sorry you ladies had to see that.”

“I don’t mind, really,” Irene drawled offhandedly. “Even diamonds have their flaws. I’m still far superior to him in every way.”

“I don’t really care,” Helen agreed readily. “More importantly, are you okay?”

“Thank you... all of you.”

Nonetheless, the phantom of Theobolt’s words still lingered in their hearts. Their earlier cheer was nowhere to be seen as they quietly waited.

It wasn’t long, however, before Seiichi arrived.

※ ※ ※

When I, Seiichi Hiiragi, finally arrived at the training grounds, the class had all the happiness and cheer of a funeral.

How’d things go south so quickly?! Er, wait, I guess a few of them were always this gloomy.

Beatrice-san seemed to notice their dark moods as well.

“Any idea what happened?” I asked her.

“I’m afraid not. For now, let’s simply re-focus on class.”

As soon as we got close to them, Saria's head snapped up attentively as she looked at me. "Oh, Seiichi!"

She and Lulune seemed fine, which was one less thing to worry about. The other kids also noticed our arrival and all turned their attention to us. One of them, however, still seemed to be acting a little oddly.

I turned to find Agnos looking at me as though I were a real-life superhero.

"Uh... Agnos-kun? Why're you looking at me like that?"

"C'mon, Aniki, no need to be so cold! Just call me Agnos!"

"Seriously, what's up with you?!"

I mean, I barely know the guy!

As I looked over the class for some hint, only Flora gave me a little smile. "Ahaha... Maybe it's because Saria-san and Lulune-san told us about your relationship?"

"Our what?" I got a bad feeling about that. Fearing the worst, I turned to Lulune. "So, uh, what'd you tell them about us?"

"Nothing but the truth, Master. I'm your faithful servant."

"Yeah, I was afraid of that!"

Why does she have to put it like that? I don't need everyone looking at me like some weirdo! If you're a knight, why don't you try to protect your own good name?!

As I was moping, though, someone clapped a hand on my shoulder, and I turned to come face-to-face with a cute stuffed bear.

Don't worry. Everyone has off days, read the sketchbook in Berard's hands.

That's the last thing I wanna read! Man, I wish I could cry.

Al hesitantly approached us. "Uh, Beatrice-san?"

"Yes? Is something the matter?"

"I'm in charge of grading the kids, right? I can do what I want?"

“Of course. I was planning on explaining the grading system in detail to you after school, but it can’t hurt to go over the basics now. To put it simply, every student receives a mark for both their test results and their participation—that, of course, includes their attitude and attendance as well.”

Al nodded. “Great. That Theobolt’s getting a zero in participation, then.”

“Seriously, just what happened while we were gone?!”

I had no idea who Theo-whatever was, but his grade was decimated in the blink of an eye.

Man, teachers are scary.

Chapter 8: Composite Class, Part 1

I rubbed my hands together. “All right, why don’t we get started? Who wants to show me their stuff first?”

I still wasn’t used to taking control of a group like that, but I tried to do what Beatrice-san recommended. I’d have to size up their talents either way.

“Anybody want to start—”

Agnos’s hand shot up into the air. “Me, me! Aniki, pick—”

“I’m first,” Helen cut him off.

“H-Hey! No butting!” Agnos protested. “You gotta wait your turn, Helen! I wanna go first!”

She shot him a dark look. “Shut up.”

“A-Aniki!” Agnos blubbered. “Why’s everyone so mean to me?!”

C’mon, show a little fighting spirit like you did on that herbology exam.

Berard tapped him on the shoulder and held up his sketchbook again. *Don’t worry. Everyone has off days.*

“Haven’t you been gettin’ a little too much use outta that page?! And hey, you’re not even looking me in the eye!”

He showed me those same words, I thought idly as Helen squared up against me.

“All right, let’s set some ground rules for our sparring,” I said. “You can use whatever weapon you’d like.”

I have defense out the wazoo, after all. I should be A-OK, even if they hit me.

“One more thing,” I added. “Since I want an idea of all your abilities, feel free to use magic. Don’t worry, though—I won’t cast a single spell in return.”

Helen's expression instantly darkened. She had always given off a prickly feeling, but now she felt outright threatening.

"You think I'm that weak, huh?"

"No, I don't. Really."

I just didn't want to risk hurting them. I couldn't exactly hurt my students—or worse—on the first day of class. Besides, I wanted to measure their abilities, not mine.

Or wait, I guess anti-magic defense is pretty important, too. Whatever, it's not like this is the only class we'll get together.

"Okay," Helen said in a low voice. "Your funeral."

"Yep. Lay it on me."

Does it really bother her that much? I didn't mean anything by it, honest.

"Unfortunately for you, though, I can't use magic."

"You what?"

I blinked in shock.

She can't? Not at all?

I activated Clairvoyance to check her magic aptitude, just like I had when teaching Saria and the others their magic. Sure enough, I discovered she had hidden proficiencies with not one but two elements—Fire and Earth. When I used Clairvoyance, I'd be able to see if there were any elements the person hadn't discovered yet, since they were conveniently marked 'Unrealized.' I wasn't too worried about that, though. It was my job to teach her magic.

I wonder if that has anything to do with her being a 'failure', though?

As I pondered, she pulled two shortswords out of nowhere—probably an Item Box or something similar—and dropped into a ready stance. In response, I drew White, the Rapier of Burgeoning Love, from its sheath on my hip. It felt like forever since the last time I drew it. After all, I'd been using a wooden practice sword when training with Louisse, and I beat the monster horde with magic alone.

As an aside, I was using my real sword here instead of a practice sword because I wanted the best measure of their strength I could get. I wouldn't have told Helen to use her regular weapons in the first place if my Stats were lower—and if I had tried to pull something like this back on Earth, I would've been dead in seconds. On top of that, I was specifically using White because it could give my HP and MP to any ally touched, which in this case meant anyone the blade came in contact with. I could hurt Helen by accident if I used any other sword, but as long as I thought of her as an ally and used the healing effect, I couldn't hurt her. It seemed like the best choice overall.

Beatrice-san, however, looked at me in worry. “Er... Seiichi-san? Are you certain you want to fight her without magic? As it happens, she's one of the stronger students here, despite having no magic ability.”

“I'll be fine,” I reassured her. “Oh, and can I get you to judge our match? Let's say we go until one of us surrenders or faints.”

Helen narrowed her eyes. “All right. Just don't blame me if you regret it.”

“Relax, I'll be fine. Give me everything you've got. We'll start as soon as you're ready.”

“Oh, I'm gonna make you cry like a baby.”

Before she'd finished speaking, she closed the distance between us in a flash and thrust right at my eye level. To my eyes, though, she may as well have been moving in slow motion.

Hmm... Not bad, I guess, but nowhere near Lousse's level.

She was clearly aiming for a lethal blow, though, even if her shortsword was still sheathed. That was definitely a pass in my books. Lousse always told me that practicing too much could make you squeamish in a real fight and that holding back all the time was dangerous. Helen seemed to be going for the kill, which was a great sign.

I dodged her attack with a simple half-step back and away from her.

Her eyes widened in surprise. “What?! Try this, then!”

She smoothly transitioned into a roundhouse kick, but I nimbly ducked out of her way. She continued to make attack after attack, but nothing she did could even graze me—forget that I barely moved a step away from my starting point the whole time.

Well, what do you know? I can really feel the effects of sparring with Louise.

Our sparring back then was mainly just regular attacks, but through that practice, I'd gotten a feel for what offensive Skills I should use when. Not only that, but I'd gotten a good feel for all sorts of sword techniques from copying Louise's movements. None of it showed up on my Status. But I thought that was probably because not only did I change the movements up to be more familiar to me, but Louise herself didn't seem to see the motions as any kind of swordplay.

I put my new abilities to good use in dodging Helen repeatedly. After an especially frustrated flurry of slashes, she jumped back to put some distance between us, glaring at me.

"Hahh... hah... just how many sword styles do you know?! I could only pick out the Belzard Swaying Willow Style's sweeping kicks and the Heaven's Edge's own Guardian God-Blade Style. But you threw in a dozen other moves I've never even seen before! Not only that, your proficiency is basically Master-level... no, Founder-level! Who the hell even are you?!"

"Uh... I don't know?"

"How?!"

I really didn't know what to say. I was pretty sure I was just copying what Louise did. I had no idea what I was doing in the first place. Besides, I couldn't answer her question seriously if I wanted to.

Seriously, what am I? A failed Hero? Or just an adventurer? That's a question for the philosophers, I guess.

Helen's expression hardened. "Fine, I'll admit it. I underestimated you."

"Huh?"

"That ends now. Get ready for my *real* power."

She brought the tips of her shortswords together, pointed squarely at me, then lowered her stance and drew her weapons up close beside her face. It was the kind of stance I'd expect to see from a single big sword, not two smaller ones.

What's she even trying to do?

She narrowed her eyes at me. "Try not to die, now."

"Did you say die?!"

She's not really gonna use an attack like that on me, is she?! I know I kind of brought this on myself, but seriously?!

Before I could say anything else, she closed the distance between us in the blink of an eye and extended her weapons.

"Secret Technique—Twinfang Thrust!"

It was another thrust aimed for my face—but again, it barely seemed faster than her first thrust, to the point where I couldn't even tell the difference if I stopped to squint. Instead of trying to figure out her speed, I leaned back out of the way of her attack, grabbed her arms, and threw her just *very lightly* away from me.

"Kyaaaaahh!!"

"Aw, crap."

Unfortunately, I grossly underestimated my strength. I ended up tossing her a fair distance up in the air—about 150 feet or so.

Damn you, me!

Having already checked her abilities with Analysis and Clairvoyance, I knew she could not make it down unscathed. I didn't even want to think about what'd happen if she hit the ground from that high up.

I shifted my position a little bit so that I was right under where she'd landed and jumped. In an instant, I was up on Helen's level.

Her eyes widened in shock at the sight of me. "What the hell?!"

“Sorry, I didn’t think I’d throw you this far! Don’t worry. I’ll get you down okay!”

She was pale and trembling in terror, so I scooped her up in a princess carry to hold her steady. Unfortunately, that only seemed to confuse her.

“Huh?!”

“I’m so sorry! Just hold on for a little while!”

I was just as flustered for putting Helen in such danger. It didn’t even occur to me to use magic to descend safely or use my Garuda Boots. We were going so fast that the wind had blown my hood clean off, but I didn’t even care, and Helen had fortunately clamped her eyes tightly shut.

“You might feel a jolt, but just hang on!”

“Huh?”

I had no plan except somehow sticking to the landing. Fortunately, I could bend my knees the exact instant we hit the ground, completely absorbing the impact. There wasn’t even a crater or anything, and I was still standing soundly on my feet.

Thanks, body, for being so screwed up. I’m pretty sure I’m breaking a few laws of physics. I mean, that was skyscraper height. How am I even supposed to take this? More importantly, how am I still a “human”?!

I looked down at Helen, who was still sound in my arms. She was evidently still bracing for impact, but she slowly opened her eyes since none had come.

“I’m... alive?”

“Sorry about that.”

“About... huh?”

She slowly looked up at me. She was really pretty, and under normal circumstances, I’d probably be blushing like crazy, but this clearly wasn’t the time for that. As she began to come to her senses, her face began to turn red, and she started flailing in my arms.

“Sh-Shit! Let me go, now!”

“S-Sorry.”

I gently set her down, but she didn't stand up. She just sat there, face bright as a traffic light.

“Uh... You okay?”

“... me.”

“What was that?”

She whipped around to face me with a look of more rage than embarrassment. “I said my knees gave out! Help me up, will you?!”

“Sorry?!”

I scooped her up in my arms again and carried her over to where her classmates were waiting. For a long time, none of them even breathed. Only Saria and Lulune were still as calm as if nothing had happened.

“You're so cool, Seiichi!”

“A princess carry from Master? What enviable privilege.”

Al and Origa-chan were just as baffled as everyone else. This was probably Al's first time seeing me openly flaunting my physical powers, and I couldn't blame her for being surprised. Origa-chan wasn't as surprised, probably because she'd fought me before. Fortunately, the other classes in the training grounds seemed too far away to notice what I did.

“So, uh... What now? Do we keep fighting?”

She blushed a little and turned away. “N-No way. Like I could keep it up now.”

“Okay.”

Beatrice-san hurriedly regained her composure. “Er... Helen-san is unable to fight. Honestly, I'm surprised you're both okay.”

I laughed awkwardly. “Haha... sorry. Can I leave her to you?”

“Of course.”

After leaving Helen with Beatrice-san, I ensured my hood was back in place before addressing the rest of the class.

They already saw my face, though, didn't they? I really wanted to avoid showing what I looked like, especially with the Heroes right around here.

I still wanted to meet and talk with Shouta and my other acquaintances, but I had no interest in seeing the guys who bullied me again. I wasn't traumatized by them or anything. But it wouldn't be a pleasant experience all the same—not to mention that I wanted to keep Saria and the others out of trouble.

"All right," I called out, clapping my hands together. "Who's next?"

Most of them were still trying to wrap their heads around what happened, but Blud was the first of them to come to his senses.

"Hmm... Can I call you Seiichi-sensei?"

"Uh, sure."

"In that case, Seiichi-sensei, I would like to be your next opponent."

"Great."

"But do you mind if instead of going alone, I enlisted the aid of Agnos and the others?"

"The hell?!" Agnos whipped around to glare at him. "What's the big idea?!"

"Isn't it obvious? I can't show my true strength alone."

"And I'm supposed to fight for you?!"

"Why, what else? Besides, I need your strength to showcase my true potential. Anything less would be disingenuous, wouldn't it?"

"You're really tryin' to make wimpin' out sound good, aren't ya?!"

"Wimping...? You fool. Only an absolute idiot would try to accomplish everything on his own."

Huh... They argue a lot, but I can tell they're friends.

As an aside, it didn't matter to me what Blud needed to show his true strength. I'd technically had some experience fighting against groups with Louise, too.

"If you want to team up with somebody, Blud, then be my guest."

“Thank you.” He turned to Agnos with a raised brow. “So? Your decision?”

Agnos scratched at his head in frustration. “Ah, fine! Fine! You win! I guess I can help a fucking shrimp like you not get stomped!”

“Hmph. About time.”

“You really piss me off, you know that?!”

Berard scribbled something on his notepad. *I’ll help, too.*

“Berard? I greatly appreciate it.”

“Hey, why’s he getting’ special treatment? I’m gonna cry one of these days!”

“If you want to cry, then be my guest.”

“WAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!”

With that, they were up to a threesome—although Agnos was still in tears.

Don’t be like that, man.

Blud ignored his friend’s turmoil as he turned to the last boy.

“Leon? Could you lend me your strength as well?”

He twitched in surprise, then frantically shook his head no. “Sorry, sorry, sorry! I-I, um, I can’t...!”

Blud sighed. “Sorry. Forget I said anything.”

Something about Leon’s reaction seemed off to me. Not even when he was introducing himself back in the classroom did he seem so genuinely terrified.

“You okay, Leon?” I asked.

He jumped in surprise. “I-I’m sorry, I’m so, so sorry! I-I... I can’t fight,” he trailed off in a hoarse little whisper.

I really don’t want to force him into it.

Maybe it would be better to stand my ground and insist that he participate like everyone else, but I couldn’t bring myself to do that to him. As I looked around, I realized I wasn’t the only one puzzled by his reaction.

“All right, Leon, you can sit back and watch with Beatrice-san.”

He began muttering to himself as he dragged his feet toward where she was waiting. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry...”

Beatrice-san shot him a questioning look, then made eye contact with me and nodded briefly. It looked like I was good to leave him in her care.

I returned to my starting spot from my fight with Helen and drew White again. “Everyone, get ready. I’m good to start whenever you are.”

Blud drew a classic longsword from his belt. Berard put his hand through some knuckle dusters. They looked just like classic brass knuckles. Agnos, however, pulled out an aluminum baseball bat.

“Uh... Agnos? Are you really fighting with that?”

“Yep! This’s my old bud, Foul Swing!”

That’s a pretty cringe-worthy name, but I’d be lying if I didn’t fit a delinquent lookalike to a T!

As for Berard’s brass knuckles, they certainly seemed to fit him. However, I didn’t know how useful they’d be in a real fight.

Just before we got started, though, Blud raised his hand.

“Seiichi-sensei? Can we have a moment? I’d like to work out a strategy.”

“Sure, why not?”

Plans are pretty important, even if I’m too dumb to think of any myself.

Since I had some time, I decided to use Clairvoyance on each of the boys. Just as I thought, Blud, Agnos, and Berard all had the capacity to use magic, but it was ‘Unrealized’, just like with Helen.

Leon, however, was a different case altogether. He could use magic, all right—*five whole elements*. From what I’d learned in Terbelle’s library and the palace’s books, just being able to use two elements was amazing. Leon was a diamond in the rough in the truest sense. That only confused me more, though.

What’s he doing in Class F? What’s he so afraid of?

Before I had time to think it over too much, though, Blud and the others seemed to have decided on their strategy.

“Sorry for making you wait,” Blud apologized cordially.

“No problem. You can make the first move as soon as you’re all ready.”

As I readied White, Agnos was the first to move.

“Here I come, Aniki!”

He charged right at me and swung his bat right down at my head. Just like Helen, he didn’t seem to hesitate.

I effortlessly stepped aside, letting his bat collide with the ground—but from there, he used it to prop himself up as he launched into a spinning kick.

“Eat this!”

“Huh?!”

I wasn’t expecting a move like that. He’d taken me totally off-guard. Louisse and everyone else I’d sparred with tended to make some distance as soon as their weapon touched the ground. Without even realizing it, I’d picked up a bad habit. Of course, everyone had different ways of fighting, and I had to work on being more adaptable.

Thinking that, I continued to dodge a flurry of unorthodox attacks from Agnos. He didn’t have the same polished grace that Helen did, but his seemingly-endless chain of attacks was effective in its own right. That did mean, however, that he was incredibly hard to read, and I couldn’t keep myself from reflexively lashing back at him.

“Oops!”

I was still a total beginner at real combat, and when I got caught off-guard, I tended to forget what I practiced and lose control of my Skills. That was exactly what happened here, and while I had intended to only defend against him, I found myself lunging out at Agnos.

Normally, that would take him right out of the fight. Instead, however—

“Hm?!”

Berard suddenly cut between us, clamping my blade between his knuckle dusters and deflecting my sword from its mark.

I was holding back. But even so, I should've had more than enough time to back away or counterattack. Instead, I left myself open like a total novice, and Agnos wasn't about to miss such a chance. He charged at me with another unpredictable strike, like a raging bull.

“RAAAAAAHH!!”

“Whoop!”

Fortunately, I had the raw Stats to carry me out of that tight spot without too much trouble, and I easily dodged his attacks.

Agnos and Berard have perfect teamwork, but what've I got? A big pile of mistakes, that's what.

I had enough raw power to force my way through most things, but at times like this, it was painfully clear how little I knew still, and I was terrified I'd screw up big time. I wasn't worried about losing, though—I was afraid I might accidentally cause collateral damage.

I took a deep breath as I focused on weaving through the pair's attacks. Unfortunately, I'd already made another mistake.

“Forgotten about me, have you?”

It was Blud's voice, coming from right behind me. In the heat of the fight, I'd forgotten about him altogether. I whipped around to find him mid-thrust, the tip of his blade half an inch from my face and closing. Even given how slowly it seemed to be moving, I didn't have the time to react.

Yep, no dodging that now.

What I didn't expect, though, is that my body would take things into its own hands. I still didn't have a handle on Auto-Defense, and it wasn't about to let me take a hit so easily.

I found myself ducking down with startling speed, and in one smooth, sweeping kick, I swept all three boys' feet clean out from under them. They tumbled to the ground in what seemed to be slow motion, and just to be sure, I made three swift thrusts into the ground by each of their heads. Then, I leveled White at Blud's eyes, just like he had to me.

...

Oh, DAMMIT! Why can't I learn to control myself?!

All it took was the slightest danger to totally lose control. I clearly needed tons more training still.

I mean, I get surprised, and I automatically whup everyone's asses? Is that how this is supposed to work? I'm living proof that all the Skills in the world are useless if you can't use them well.

For now, the important thing was that I got a decent idea of everyone's fighting styles, and I had a direction for my classes now. As odd as it sounded, I still had plenty of room to grow and get stronger myself.

I'm tired of getting dragged around by my own body, after all.

As I was getting lost in my thoughts, I realized that Berard had pulled out his sketchbook again. Agnos looked up at me enthusiastically, and Blud had a thin smile on his face.

"I knew it, Aniki, you're great! Looks like I lose!"

We surrender.

"Hmph. First your face, then your monstrous strength... You've full of surprises, aren't you? I give."

With that, the battle was over. I didn't know what Blud was referring to about my face, but as for the strength thing... well, I didn't know what exactly he was getting at with that, either. Only one thing was clear.

I'm more surprised than any of them, honest!

Chapter 9: Composite Class, Part 2

“So what exactly was your strategy, Blud?”

That was the first question that came to mind as the three of them stood up.

“Oh, nothing much. I simply suggested that the two of them pressure you with their attacks and take your attention. Then, as soon as you’d forgotten about me, I’d attack you from behind.”

“Makes sense. I’m pretty sure your only mistake was talking and letting me know you were behind me.”

If he hadn’t stopped to gloat, he might’ve succeeded in his surprise attack—nothing was a sure bet between Clairvoyance and Auto-Defense, after all, but as long as I didn’t activate the former, I was pretty much defenseless. Not only that, if I was in total control of my body, I wouldn’t have even needed Auto-Defense. That just made my turning around feel even more critical.

Blud shook his head. “No, I was specifically trying to revert your attention. In doing so, I could split your focus from Agnos and Berard and, by extension, give them an opening. I may be competent with a sword, but I’m in no way a master. The plan was always for me to be the decoy for the others.”

My jaw dropped.

So Agnos and Berard were supposed to look like the decoys when actually they were the key? ‘Nothing much’, my ass!

I couldn’t plan that effectively if I tried, and it was hard to believe we were the same age. Even if it turned out plotting things out like that was common, I sure didn’t have the brains to do it. The really sad thing is, I never even considered *any* of them could be decoys in the first place!

I mean, I needed to beat all three of them to win anyways, right? Yeah, okay, that’s an excuse. I’ll admit it, I’m clueless! Happy now?!

A bitter smile crept across Blud's lips. "I suppose the matter of decoys never mattered to you in the first place, did it?"

Oh, no, he saw right through me!

All I could do was smile feebly at him.

With that, Blud and the others went back to the sidelines to watch the next match. I turned to the three remaining students.

"Okay, what next?"

Flora, Rachel, and Irene all raised their hands.

"Me, me, me! I think we should all team up!"

"Can we, can we~?"

It looked like they were taking a page out of the boys' book, and just like with them, I had no reason to turn them down. It'd even give me a chance to try and improve on my shortcomings from the last battle.

"Yeah!" Flora pumped her fists. "Let's do this!"

"Don't go too hard on us~"

It was then that I realized Irene was acting funny.

"Something wrong?" I asked her.

She didn't reply. Her eyes were glued to the ground sullenly. After a long moment, she sighed.

"Oh, what's the point?"

"Huh?"

I didn't know how to respond to that.

"Don't you realize how gorgeous you are?" she spat. "How dare you hide under that hood?! You're depriving humanity of one of its greatest treasures! Beauty exists to be flaunted. You have a solemn duty to show your face to the undeserving common folk! But no! You, Seiichi-sensei, are flouting your duties in a manner most foul!"

"U-Uh... Sorry?"

“Don’t bother apologizing. Your crime is beyond all forgiveness! As a true beacon of perfection, I shan’t rest until you take up your burden!”

“You don’t have to. Seriously, don’t.”

I tried to smile at her, but it was a genuine struggle.

Seriously, what’s the deal with my face? I haven’t looked in a mirror since coming to this world... actually, I don’t remember seeing an actual mirror here, ever.

To be honest, I didn’t care what I looked like. Not knowing couldn’t hurt me, after all. The Fruits of Evolution had changed even my bone structure quite a bit, probably even rewriting my DNA, and it was enough to know that I didn’t look like I did on Earth.

Haha, what if that painting May drew turns out to be my real face? Honestly, I’d be pretty happy if that’s the case. She made me look so handsome.

While mulling over Irene’s words, I realized she’d pulled out her weapon and had taken up her place with the other two girls. She was still visibly fuming.

“What are you doing, Seiichi-sensei?! Let’s get started now! The battle for true beauty begins now!”

“Uh, it’s just a regular practice match.”

The girls faced me head-on. Like with my match against Blud and the guys, I scanned their Stats, but none of them had magic they could use, either.

That made it official. None of them deserved to be called failures offensively. That meant it all depended on their inability to use magic. It made sense for that to be a big deal in a magic academy, but it still seemed a little harsh. There was always the possibility that the other kids were even stronger than the Class 2-F kids. But Beatrice-san said that Helen was pretty strong, so that didn’t seem likely. The weirdest thing of all was that Leon *could* use magic. It all seemed arbitrary.

Oh, and just to be clear, I’m only looking at the magic proficiency bit of the info! I’m doing what I can to protect their privacy, especially the girls’ three sizes

and stuff like that. There's some stuff I just don't need to know, Clairvoyance! That's why I have no idea what kind of sword style Helen was using.

With that, I looked at the trio opposite of me. Flora was holding a greatsword nearly as big as she was, Rachel had a spear, and Irene was carrying a scythe.

Irene looked at her reflection in the scythe's blade and sighed. "Oh, why must I look so perfect, no matter what I hold. I'm a gorgeous goddess of death—one who will steal the soul of my poor, dull teacher!"

"I hope you're ready—"

"We're not gonna hold back, okay? Here we come!"

Well, that's a nice little summary of their personalities, I thought as I readied myself.

The next second, Flora was the first to move. She picked up her sword with terrifying ease and closed the distance between us, aiming for a wide horizontal slash through my gut.

"Here goes! Hahhhh!!"

I effortlessly killed the momentum of her attack, then backed up to give me some breathing room. Irene followed me step for step, though, aiming for my neck.

"Your head is mine! I'll put it on display for the good of all the people of this world!"

"I didn't even do anything wrong! Why do you need to make an 'example' of me?!"

"No, perhaps I'll leave your body attached... that way, the common folk can also appreciate your magnificent body!"

"But I'll be dead either way!"

She didn't even seem to hear me as I dodged slash after slash.

Okay, not bad. I'm really moving.

Louisse had taught me a lot of fundamental footwork, so all that was left was to make the moves on my own. I dodged attack after attack from the two girls,

trying to keep my movement to a minimum.

“Oh, c’mon! Why won’t you get hit already?”

“Kh! You’re almost decent, Seiichi-sensei! But I shan’t surrender—not before your head is mounted on a stake!”

“Seriously, give that up already!”

Irene was starting to slow down a little, the weight of her weapon clearly starting to get to her. Flora, however, was still running at full steam.

Wow, she’s got stamina for days.

At that moment, I felt a chill run down my spine. I quickly checked Clairvoyance, and sure enough, Rachel was behind me. I ducked down on the spot just as her spear went through the point where my head just was. Unlike the others, her attack felt shakier.

Okay, so Rachel has problems attacking for real. Noted.

I turned around to find her standing in place behind me, her face an obvious mix of surprise and relief. From there, I jumped away from them so that I could see them all at once. With that, they resumed their attack, with Rachel joining in alongside the other two.

“Hyaaaah!!”

DOOMM!

Flora’s sword smashed into the ground, sending dirt and dust flying up all around them.

“Hah!”

Then, with perfect accuracy, Irene swung for my neck. Even Rachel joined in the offensive, flanking me and jabbing at me with neatly-drilled moves.

Flora’s attacks were sloppy, as if she was trying to break me with sheer force. But Irene and Rachel had clearly received some sort of formal weapon training, just like Helen. Rachel, in particular, had clearly been practicing her craft for a long time now.

As an aside, my <<>> Skill would normally steal other Skills for my own use, but I, of course, couldn't take Helen's Secret Technique or magic for my own. If they were to specifically teach me, I could probably pick it up easily enough.

Oddly enough, it wasn't activating for any of Rachel's Skills. She clearly had some great technique, but I could tell she wasn't used to actual combat at all.

All right, I think it's time I stopped just dodging and went on the offensive.

"Take this!" Flora shouted with another huge overhead cleave. Just before it made contact with me, I put my Rapier of Burgeoning Love along the side of her blade, causing it to slide harmlessly off-target as I slipped into her guard.

Her eyes flew open in shock. "Huh?! You're kidding!"

"Not so fast!"

Irene swung to take a chunk out of my back, but instead of dodging, I stepped on the flat of her blade, letting it propel me faster.

I'd gotten a good idea of how good she was, so after getting close enough to put the tip of my sword against her neck, symbolizing I'd beaten her, I flicked her back and out of the fight.

"That's one!"

"Agh!"

"Flora!" Irene cried, the blade of her scythe dipping into the ground.

"You're number two."

Taking advantage of her surprise, I circled around behind her and ran White along her neck, signifying her defeat. Then I put my hands over hers from behind, and with one circular throw, I pulled her weapon out of the ground and sent her flying behind me.

"Hyaaaagh?!"

"All right, one left."

"No, you don't~"

As I turned my attention to Rachel, she aimed a savage thrust at me. I casually avoided her attack and laid into her with a slash of my own.

To my surprise, though, she blocked my attack.

“Hngh!”

“Huh?!”

“Yahh!” she shouted as she made her counter.

I could still feel that she was hesitating too much, but she was actually keeping pace with me decently well.

Wow. Irene and Helen were pretty good, too, but she’s on a whole different level.

Unfortunately for her, though, that was as far as she’d get.

“That’s enough for today,” I said, grabbing the shaft of her spear with my free hand and giving her a sharp tug toward me.

“Huh?!”

She tried to resist my pull, but she couldn’t match my raw Strength even with me holding back. Once she’d lost her footing, I used her momentum to send her tumbling to the ground, then tapped her neck with White just like I had the others.

“What~?”

Fortunately, I didn’t make the same mistake I had with Helen, and she didn’t go flying into the air.

I can practically feel myself growing. The throws aside, I think I’ve really been in control this whole time, and none of my Skills went and activated themselves in bad ways. All that practice with Louise definitely paid off.

The three girls finally managed to get back to their feet.

Flora rubbed her head, wincing. “Owow... Sensei, that’s just mean! What if this bump on my head makes me stupid? You better take responsibility!”

“I lost...? I, the very image of perfection, lost? In a matter of beauty, no less?!”

“Ohh~ You’re too strong, Seiichi-sensei~”

Flora and Irene's complaints aside, they were all doing surprisingly well. That was about what I was hoping for, of course—it'd suck if I hurt them even when I was holding back as best I could.

"Uh..." Beatrice-san's mouth flapped open and shut for a moment. "S-Seiichi-sensei wins!"

With that, though, I'd finished assessing everyone's abilities except for Lulune and Saria, who I didn't need to look at again. I barely had time to let out a sigh of relief before a bell rang out across the training grounds.

Beatrice-san looked up. "It seems it's lunchtime already."

"Wait, really?"

I never would've guessed. Did those practice matches really take that much time?

"All right!" Agnos pumped his fists. "All that runnin' around got me so hungry I could die!"

Blud nodded solemnly. "Well, it was nice knowing you."

"Hey! I ain't gonna die for real!"

"I must admit, though, Seiichi-sensei is quite the enigma. He possesses strength the likes of which I've never seen, yet I've never heard of him before."

Irene nodded. "Definitely. I must admit, though, I wasn't expecting Rachel to be able to move like that."

"Looks can indeed be deceiving," Blud mused with a smile.

"Uh, hello?" Agnos waved his hand in Blud's face. "I ain't dead. See? Can you hear me?!"

The students already seemed ready to eat. Now that I had a moment, I noticed that the other classes using the field had already begun to disperse.

I turned to Beatrice-san. "Is it okay if we just go to lunch now?"

"Of course. What would you like to do after lunch? Since Saria and Lulune are friends of yours, I imagine you know their strengths already."

"Yeah, I guess. I'll ask them just to be sure, though."

“Understood. First, though, it’s time for lunch.”

Beatrice-san issued a few short instructions, after which the class eagerly dispersed to fill their bellies. I still had no idea where I could get food at the Academy, but luckily, Beatrice-san seemed to have a plan.

“I don’t believe I introduced you or your friends to the cafeteria, have I? Would you care to eat together?”

“Really? You don’t mind or anything?”

“Of course. The students will be eating there as well. I must admit, though, I’ve always wanted to have lunch with another teacher.”

She smiled somewhat shyly, but my mind was already on other things.

Why’d she put it so weirdly? She’s had lunch with other teachers before, right? How could she not? Don’t tell me she gets treated like trash because she teaches Class F? Seriously, this whole damn school is a mess. Why can’t people just get along like human beings?

I tried not to let that dark realization dampen my mood, however, as I, Saria, Lulune, Origa-chan, and Al followed her to the cafeteria.

Along the way, I decided to ask Saria and Lulune what they thought about fighting me.

“I wanna try! It’s been forever since we fought in the Forest, so I wanna see how strong you are now!”

“What delicacies do you suppose they have in the cafeteria, Master? I can’t wait to see what they have!”

That doesn’t count as a response, Lulune.

Since Saria would be fighting, I decided to have Lulune fight as well. It was her fault for not hearing me out, after all.

We made small talk the rest of the way to the cafeteria. Surprisingly, it was far bigger and fancier than any high-school food court I’d seen back on Earth. In addition to regular table seats, there were counter seats, and even a terrace, all of which were tightly packed with students. It had a more university feel than

the food courts I was familiar with. But it had a cleanliness and air of refinement that just blew me away.

“Whoa...”

“Master, look at that!”

Lulune eagerly pointed at a massive menu situated beside the order counter.

“Damn,” Al muttered. “Since when did schools have such a big menu?”

Beatrice-san puffed out her chest with pride. “We have classic dishes from all over the continent, and we serve all three meals. Many of our students and faculty have dietary restrictions, after all, so it’s only natural that we cater to a wide variety of palates. We wouldn’t be able to offer such a menu if not for all the different countries in attendance here.”

Lulune swallowed hard. “*Global* food, you say?!”

“... Glutton,” Origa-chan said with a shake of her head. “You’re drooling.”

And you call yourself older than her, Lulune?

The rest of us were just as amazed, so I couldn’t blame her too much.

Saria eagerly grabbed my arm. “Seiichi, let’s go get a better look!”

“H-Hey, no need to pull me! I’m coming!”

At that moment, I heard a voice from behind me—a familiar voice that I hadn’t heard in ages.

“Seiichi...?”

“Huh?”

I turned around, and sure enough, *she* was there.

“Wha...?!”

It was none other than my senpai and childhood friend—Karen Kannazuki was staring at me in wide-eyed surprise.

Chapter 10: Love Triangle

She had silky, waist-length black hair and piercing eyes. She was dressed in the same high school uniform I'd ruined back in the Forest of Endless Heartbreak. Her long, slender legs were clad in black tights. Even though I tried to avoid her back on Earth, I ran into her often enough that there was no mistaking her now. It was Kannazuki-senpai, no doubt about it.

"Seiichi-kun?" she muttered in disbelief. "Is that really you?"

I was just as baffled as she was. I knew she had to be at the Academy, of course, and I figured I'd run into her eventually. I needed to know if she was safe, after all. Running into her so suddenly was a bigger shock than I thought it'd be.

"Uh... Um, I... Um. Ah."

My words wouldn't form properly for some reason.

There are no words for this, seriously! What are the chances I'd randomly bump into her like this?! I mean, damn, what are you supposed to say at times like this?! A casual "Hey, it's been a while?" A friendly "How've you been?" Or what if I go whole hog with "Hi, girlfriend! Wanna grab a bite?"

I took a few deep breaths. It was clear that I needed to calm down.

As I stared blankly at her, though, Kannazuki-senpai folded her arms.

"Hmph. That way, you fumble with your words, struggle to adapt quickly, and, most damningly, how your breathing has increased by an interval of roughly 0.2 seconds... It has to be you."

"That's how you tell it's me?!"

How does she even know that stuff? Heck, even I don't know how often I breathe! Was she always like this?!

She was a cool and composed beauty who everybody seemed to love. I couldn't imagine her becoming some kind of over-analyzing pervert.

Eyes brimming with tears, she rushed at me and hugged me tight.

"What?!" came Al's indignant voice from behind me.

I couldn't even react. Her sudden hug left me frozen in shock.

"I'm so glad... You're all right! I knew you would be okay, and yet I couldn't shake my fears completely. I don't even know what to say!"

"U-Uh..."

So she was worried about me this whole time?

Between my sudden weight loss, change in height, and even my voice change, I was afraid she wouldn't even know who I was. I still had my hood on, even.

As she hugged me, I could feel her tremble with emotion.

Wow. I had it better than I ever knew.

Even when I was ugly back on Earth, even though I was bullied day in and day out, there were people who genuinely cared about me. I was a real idiot to push them away and insist I was alone.

Just as I was about to put my arms around Kannazuki-senpai, her voice suddenly took on a deeper, more threatening tone.

"You smell like women."

"I... huh?"

I broke out in a cold sweat, even though I had no idea why.

What's wrong with me? Why the chill all of a sudden?

As I tried to figure out what was happening, she pulled away from me and fixed me with a horrifyingly expressionless look.

"You smell like *women*."

"Why're you repeating that?!"

I still had no idea what was going on, but my instincts told me I was in mortal danger.

It was then that she finally noticed Saria and the others.

“Hm? Who are they?”

Finally, a change of topic.

“Oh, they’re—”

“How odd,” she interrupted, narrowing her eyes at the girls. “I can smell Seiichi-kun’s scent on you. How very puzzling indeed.”

“What’s more puzzling is that sense of smell!” I blurted out.

Seriously, is she perfect even down to her nostrils?!

Kannazuki-senpai cleared her throat. “I am Karen Kannazuki. I have been *with Seiichi-kun as his childhood friend for many years*. Who are you?”

Something about how she was talking sounded off, and she seemed oddly prideful for some reason.

Saria smiled warmly at her. “Nice to meet you! I’m Saria, Seiichi’s *wife*.”

“Bfgh.” Kannazuki-senpai coughed up a bit of blood, but she quickly wiped it away. “I’m sorry, I must’ve misheard you. I thought you said you were his wife, of all the accursed things you could’ve said.”

I scratched my head. “Uh... Embarrassing as it is to admit, you heard right.”

“Bfleggh,” came a second spout of blood from her mouth. She shot me another eerily blank look. “You’re saying you’re...more than lovers with this woman?”

“Yeah.”

“Have you smooched with her?”

“Smooch...?”

It was a weird way of phrasing it, but I was more focused on how embarrassing it was to admit it. I ended up just averting my gaze. Saria likewise blushed bashfully.

“You did... didn’t you?”

“Uh, we... um... yeah.”

I braced for the worst—but unexpectedly, tears began to brim in her eyes.



“To think the lips I’ve been planning to take for so long have already been stolen...”

“Uh, Kannazuki-senpai?”

I had no idea what she was talking about. All I knew was that she seemed to be spiraling into despair.

“If you’ve already had your first kiss, then surely your virginity is also a thing of the past...”

“Wh-What are you saying?! I haven’t done anything like that!”

The color returned to her cheeks somewhat as she looked up at me. “You haven’t? You aren’t lying, are you? You can swear that nothing untoward has happened between you and that vixen?”

“I’m telling you no!”

Why am I shouting about my virginity in the middle of the cafeteria?

She let out a sigh of relief. “I suppose that’s good news.”

“Now, would you mind telling me why you care?”

She chuckled. “Oh, no need to fret. I’m just relieved we’ll still be able to exchange firsts as planned. It seems your first kiss is already a thing of the past, but I’ll be able to offer you my first as planned.”

“BZZZT! Time out!!”

What the hell is wrong with her?! Why’s she acting so differently?! I mean, this just took a seriously dirty turn! I knew girls told worse dirty jokes than guys! More importantly, what was she even getting so depressed about?

As I shuddered with the unknowable implications of what she’d said, Kannazuki-senpai turned her attention to Al.

“So? I suppose you’re Seiichi-kun’s friends as well?”

She nodded hesitantly. “Yeah, I’m Altria Grem. Who the hell are you to Seiichi, really?”

Kannazuki-senpai puffed out her chest proudly. “I’m none other than his childhood friend! I’ve known him *years* longer than any of you.”

“That so?” Al faltered for a moment, then seemed to make up her mind as her cheeks flushed red, and she looked Kannazuki-senpai in the eye. “W-Well, I’m Seiichi’s *g-g-girlfriend!*”

“Bfegk?!” Again, she hacked up a startling amount of blood.

Uh... she should really get that looked at.

As the others introduced themselves, I tried to distract myself with Kannazuki-senpai’s mysterious new health condition.

“Hmph! Childhood friend? I am Lulune, Master’s *servant* and *knight* alike!”

“... Origa Carmelia. I’m Seiichi-oniichan’s... um... little sister. We’re *family*.”

“My name is Beatrice Lognar, and I swear I’m only his teaching assistant. More importantly, how in the world do you two know each other? She’s a Hero.”

Sorry for getting you involved in this mess, Beatrice-san, but you’re exactly the voice of reason we need right now.

She was evidently the only one who found Kannazuki-senpai and my relationship at all weird.

I knew it; I’m not the crazy one after all! Kannazuki-senpai is the weirdo! And she used to be so cool and composed... Come back, chill Kannazuki-senpai!!

I looked back at her—but her eyes had rolled back into her head.

Kannazuki-senpaaaaaaaaai!!

With that, my long-awaited reunion with her turned out to be a lot messier than expected. Instead of eating, we took up an upsetting amount of space at the cafeteria’s entrance, causing such a ruckus that we were even getting the stink-eye from across the hall.

Chapter 11: The Truth

Even though Kannazuki-senpai's eyes had finally returned to normal, she had begun cackling under her breath like a broken doll.

"Hehe... hehe, hehehehehehehehehehehe..."

"K-Kannazuki-senpai! Y-You're really starting to scare me!"

It might sound pretty tame, but her face had no emotion whatsoever, and her 'laugh' was disturbingly detached. Anyone would want to call up an exorcist.

"I was a fool," she muttered to herself. "I know better than anyone how charming he is... I should've expected such unwholesome interference..."

"Uh, Senpai?"

She slowly raised her face to look at me and smiled emptily. "I'll have to tie you up, lock you away, and make sure nobody ever lays eyes on you ever again."

"GUAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARDS!!"

That's no joke! Where are Terbelle's ultra-powerful anti-pervert guards when you need them?! Somebody, call them now!

"Hehehe... no guards will come for you, and I'll personally ensure nobody stops me. My mind and body alike belong to you. Of course, you know what that means for *your* mind and body..."

"Oh, god, she's reading my mind now! Help! Somebody, anybody, help me!!"

She blushed slightly, but her eyes were like open pits into the abyss, so it was more disturbing than anything else. "Can't you see how much I care for you? I've only had eyes for you from the very beginning to the end of time. Of course, I know what you're thinking. I love you so much, I swear I'll go crazy... hehe..."

I guess having the girls go crazy for me isn't all it's cracked up to be... Wait, I don't have time to crack jokes! I never know how my brain manages to stay so

calm at times like this!

As I recoiled, shuddering, Al finally stepped in between us.

“Look, I don’t get what the hell you’re talkin’ about, but could you get away from m-my Seiichi?”

You’re so cool, Al! Hug me! And man, I’m really pathetic, aren’t I?

The two of them started a stare-down, but fortunately, Beatrice interrupted them.

“Um... Are we going to have lunch, or aren’t we?”

Thanks, Beatrice-san. You’re one of the few sane people in this crazy, crazy world.

※ ※ ※

After Al and Kannazuki-senpai agreed on a momentary truce, we all ordered lunch and sat at an empty table. Of everyone, Saria especially barely seemed to notice Kannazuki-senpai, and she didn’t hesitate to sit right beside me and attack her hamburg steak with gusto. She seemed to notice I was watching her, though, and she looked up at me in confusion.

“Hm? You okay?”

“Yeah, it’s just... Watching you eat is so relaxing, y’know?”

She blushed a little, but her smile grew even wider. “Really? Ehehe! Um, I’m happy to hear that!”

With that, she got right back to her meal.

Origa-chan likewise didn’t seem to care much about Kannazuki-senpai, and she focused on her omurice—the same thing I’d ordered. Similarly, Lulune only had eyes for her three trays full of food. She’d ordered the omurice, hamburg steak, and fried fish sets, and she was clearly loving every bite of it. Apparently, she’d ordered less than normal on purpose.

She never changes, does she?

Just as I was starting to envy her, Al cut the lunchtime mood short by glaring at Kannazuki-senpai again.

“So? Who the hell’re you? And sayin’ you’re Seiichi’s childhood friend doesn’t tell us anything, just so we’re clear.”

“Well,” Kannazuki-senpai started, “Seiichi and I have been close since far before I arrived here as what you would call a ‘Hero’.”

Al blinked in disbelief. “Hero? But wait... That’d mean Seiichi’s...”

Beatrice-san shot me an equally surprised look.

I wasn’t really trying to hide that information. I just hadn’t gotten around to telling them... and yeah, I know that’s just an excuse.

I let out a small sigh, then replied loudly enough that everyone at the table could hear me.

“That’s right. Just like Kannazuki-senpai said, I came here from another world. Trust me, though, I’m no Hero.”

I’m not that noble or important—and besides, it wasn’t like I was sent here via hero summoning, per se.

“The hell does that mean?” Al wrinkled her nose. “Sure, I heard the Kaizell Empire summoned a whole bunch of ‘em, but...”

I scratched my head uneasily. “Ahaha... Well, everyone in my old world hated my guts. When I got sent here, I was the only one who wasn’t hit by the whole Hero-summoning spell.”

“What...?!”

“Since coming here, I’ve gotten a lot thinner and taller, but back then, I was hideous. I got bullied like you wouldn’t believe.”

Luckily, I made it through the abuse with a little help from my friends.

Al was a little too silent for my comfort, so I had to know what she thought.

“Uh, Al? You don’t hate me now, do you?”

“Huh?”

“I mean, I look *totally* different now. You’d vomit at the sight of me. I have the Skill to keep my B.O. under control and everything, but at the end of the day, I’m basically a cockroach in disguise.”

I didn’t mind anyone knowing I came from another world. My real worry was how they’d treat me if they knew what I was really like. I was terrified. But still, they said they loved me—maybe they would accept me as I really was. As much as I hated my old self, it felt like the only way to really get closer to the others. Meeting Kannazuki-senpai seemed like the perfect reason to finally do it.

To give them a better idea of what I used to be like, I recalled my old body as best I could and created a spell that could produce a mini version of it.

“Figurine.”

Just like that, it appeared in the palm of my hand, and I ignored the voice in my head announcing that I’d created a new kind of Seiichi Magic. It had the same stumpy limbs, bloated body I was so familiar with, not to mention the pimple-ridden face. I couldn’t reproduce the smell, of course, but this should be enough to repulse them.

“This is what I used to look like, back when I was powerless.”

“Seiichi-kun,” Kannazuki-senpai muttered piteously as she looked at the figure, but she didn’t continue.

Let me guess, they hate me now. Of course, they’ll want to find guys who suit them better. I’m the last person they should be wasting their time with.

“But you’re you,” Saria said as if it were obvious. She seemed genuinely confused.

“Huh?”

“You’re you. The important parts haven’t changed at all, right?”

“Y-You’re kidding, right? Look at this ugly little guy. Doesn’t he make you sick?”

“Why? What about him would make me sick?”

“I-I mean... He’s ugly, right?”

“But he has your same personality, right?”

“Huh? You’re right, but...”

Kannazuki-senpai nodded. “Agreed. Nothing’s changed.”

Saria smiled at me. “See?”

“See what?”

“I like how you always overreact, you always have something snarky to say, you sometimes act really silly... You’re a lot of fun to be with, and you always make me smile. That’s why I love you!”

“S-Saria...”

“I love you because you’re you. No matter who you were or who you will be, I’ll always, aaaaaaalways love you! I’ll always love you, and you alone!”

“Huh...?”

While I was still gaping, Al shook her head disappointedly.

“And here I thought you had somethin’ serious to say... Who cares?”

There was a hint of anger in her voice, even.

“You too, Al?”

“Seiichi. You saw Terbelle, right? Nobody gives a flying fuck what you look like. Seriously, I didn’t think you were petty enough to care about this shit.”

“...”

“Just for the record, nobody in the Capital would give a damn over something like this. They accepted me, curse and all, and you think they’d shut you down ‘cause of how you look? My Calamity was just a part of what made me, me. Whatever you look like, that’s only one teeny, tiny chunk of who you are. Our problems are quirks. That’s it.”

The band of weirdos in the Guild came to mind, and I tried to imagine what they’d say if they saw me.

Hm? Why, Seiichi-kun, you’ve got quite the belly there. That’s just more fuel for exercise! Let’s turn that into raw muscle! All right, 10,000 crunches, go!

Oh, my, what a splendid body you have there! Don't you wish the entire city could see you in all your glory? Come, take off your clothes! Only glorious freedom awaits!

Hey, man. Wanna screw me?

I couldn't imagine them turning me away, even for a second. I didn't doubt for a second they'd try to rope me into their perversions like always.

While I grappled with the thought, Al continued with a calm smile.

"Sides, just like Saria, I like you 'cause you're you. That shouldn't be news—I mean, you accepted me, curse an' all."

"..."

"And, uh... I hate to put it like this, but I gotta be frank." She blushed bright red and swallowed hard before continuing. "I could never like anyone *except* you. I-I know that sounds too cutesy and demure from a chick like me, but, uh... w-we're soul mates, or whatever."

"What...?"

"Past, present, or future, it's me and you for good."

But... why would they go so far for me?

Origa-chan tugged on my sleeve. "... Seiichi-oniichan?"

"Yeah?"

"I was a bad omen... but you didn't care. I was so, so happy."

"..."

"You didn't change. I don't know you very well yet, but... I know that."

"..."

"You hugged me when I was sad. You patted my head... now, it's my turn."

With that, she tightly wrapped her little arms around me and softly stroked my hair.

"... There, there."

At some point—I didn't even know when—I'd started to cry. I always trusted them, and I knew they wouldn't reject me so easily, but opening up to them was still terrifying. I was so happy, I didn't even know what to say.

I finally found people who accept me for who I was.



At that moment, something weird happened to me—or rather, something that should have happened long ago. Finally, my body and mind felt like they were truly one. It wasn't like I was finally able to move like I wanted to or anything. No, when Saria and the others accepted my old self, I could finally accept myself, past and present. For the first time, I felt whole. It was a strange feeling, but not a bad one.

Beatrice-san finally opened her mouth to speak. "Seiichi-san, I know we haven't known each other for long, but I know. You're you, and you no doubt always have been. Everyone loves you because of that. Please don't forget it."

I wiped my tears. "I won't."

At that moment, I noticed Lulune was staring fixatedly at the figurine in my hands.

"Uh, Lulune? What's up?"

"Master? Is this truly how you appeared in the past?"

"Yeah. Why do you ask?"

The words had barely left my mouth when I noticed Lulune was drooling.

"Wait, you're kidding! Why are you *drooling*?!"

She suddenly snapped to her senses. "M-My apologies. You're wonderful beyond description now, but when I see how rough and fatty you were back then, I can't help but be enthralled."

"You'd really try to eat me, wouldn't you?!"

I was relieved she didn't think I was hideous or anything, but this felt decided wrong in a different way. Nonetheless, I found myself smiling at the thought.

"Besides," Saria chimed in with a grin, "you ate the Fruits of Evolution, right? That's proof you're still you!"

"Really?" I wondered aloud.

Beatrice-san, however, seemed outright baffled. "Did you say Fruits of Evolution?!"

"Yep!" Saria replied readily. "Me, Seiichi, and Lulune all had some!"

Lulune nodded knowingly. “Ah, that foul-tasting fruit! The very thought of it makes my taste buds recoil in horror!”

“I can’t believe it,” Beatrice-san muttered to herself dazedly. “To think they truly exist!”

Come to think of it, the Fruits are the one thing I’ve never really figured out, even after using Analysis on them.

Saria seemed to know about the Fruits from all her time in the Forest of Endless Heartbreak, but she didn’t seem to know anything past how amazing they were. This was the first actual chance I had to learn more about them. From the way Beatrice-san was reacting, they were likely even more amazing than I’d thought. I hadn’t put too much thought into them up until now, but this was a great opportunity to ask about them.

“So, uh... You know about the Fruits of Evolution?”

Al scratched her head. “Come to think of it, you mentioned somethin’ about those things back when Lulune turned human.”

Beatrice-san, having regained some of her composure, nodded. “Well, to be blunt, they shouldn’t exist. They’re fictional.”

“Huh? Fictional?”

“Precisely. They’ve only been referenced in old books, and nobody knows how or where they’re grown. It was thought that they were myths.”

“Really?”

“Really. In fact, there’s only one extant text that mentions the Fruits at all. It refers to them as miraculous things that surpass the designs of the very gods, a plant that stands at the pinnacle of all life.”

“Uh... Okay. What does that mean, exactly?”

“It means the Fruits don’t exist.”

“Huh?”

The more she said, the more confused I got.

If they don’t exist, how did I eat them? How am I still alive?

“Let me explain as simply as I can. Everything in this world, every act, every event, is laid out per the gods’ will—fate, in a word. Only the gods are privy to such knowledge.”

That made enough sense. Back on Earth, they said God was omniscient, so it’d make sense if fate or something like it existed.

But wait, the God that sent me to this world said the gods don’t have any power here. What’s with that?

“The Fruits of Evolution,” Beatrice-san continued, “are said to be beyond the gods’ vision. In other words, they exist independently from fate.”

“So the gods don’t even know the Fruits exist? They’re like wild cards?”

“Precisely.”

Whoa, that’s a lot bigger of a deal than I thought. No way a normal guy like me should be messing around with that shit. That’s really ambitious stuff!

“B-But how does anyone know stuff like that?” I asked. “What, did somebody ask the gods or something?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“Wow, *not* the answer I was expecting!”

I’ve heard about talking to God, but that’s just ridiculous! I mean, they can’t just sit down and have a conversation, can they?

“How do you ask a god something, exactly?”

“Ah, I see. You’re new to this world, so I suppose you wouldn’t know. You see, our Gods have already left this world.”

Sorry, I knew that already.

“I’ve heard there are so-called ‘gods’ in some dungeons,” she continued, “but they aren’t higher-order beings like the true Gods I’m referring to. The true Gods have abandoned our world.”

If I remember correctly, the Black Dragon God I killed was worshipped and everything, but he clearly wasn’t the kind of omnipotent being I would’ve expected from a god. It wasn’t hard to distinguish the two in my head.

“Once long ago, however, we received the Gods’ blessings. But everything changed when the Gods began to war with one another.”

“War?”

“You see, one of the Gods attempted to establish Himself as their king. He attacked his brethren, and a fierce battle broke out. Because the humans at the time supported the would-be King of the Gods, we were abandoned. The other gods beat the upstart, after all.”

“Wait, so why did humans support that one God?”

“Well, the predominant theory is that He was most generous with his blessings.”

“Okay...”

Jeez, my head’s already full of the Fruit mysteries, and now she’s laying more myths on me? Man, I wish I had a teenage super-sleuth in a kid’s body to help me close this case.

Fortunately, Beatrice-san seemed to notice I was struggling, and she continued with a slightly pitying smile.

“So, Seiichi-san, do you think it was wise for humanity to simply let the gods spoil them?”

“Uh... Maybe?”

“Well, I’m sure you can imagine what might have happened. With the aid of the Gods, humans grew lax in their labors. Humanity was in decline.”

“Okay...”

“Just imagine it—a world without natural disasters, monsters, or wars. It was a paradise. But having lost the need to compete and being given a near-perfect lifestyle, they stopped trying to better themselves at all. Humanity stopped evolving.”

“I think I get it.”

No more war was a great thing, no doubt about it. Almost everyone wanted world peace, and the thought that it had happened was too good to be true. At

the same time, though, it sounded like that'd remove one of the key pieces of being human. It was so peaceful that nobody even had to work and just living free was enough. There was no need to evolve.

"To be clear, I don't believe war was the only thing driving human evolution," Beatrice added. "But even so, with the Gods' excessive coddling, any crop became easy to cultivate, and life was possible with only the bare minimum amount of effort. It prevented people from thinking and working for themselves."

"Oh..."

"Back to the main topic, though, the old age of prosperity was ended by the war between the Gods. That one God who challenged the others was eventually sealed in this land."

"Wait, here?! So you're saying that God didn't die?"

"Defeated or not, a God is a God. They're not that easy to slay. They're higher-dimensional beings, after all. As a result of the sealing, however, the Fruits of Evolution came to be."

"I think I get it?"

I was still struggling to follow because of just how complex it'd gotten.

"There was only one person to have ever found the Fruits of Evolution, the author of the one surviving document the Fruits are mentioned in. It was none other than an ancient mentor of the Heroes—Duke Zeanos Zeford."

"What?!"

Like, the Dark Noble Zeanos? The guy I beat in the Forest of Endless Heartbreak?

"After the God was sealed away, the world grew rife with monsters, natural disasters, and wars. Zeford-kyou was a famously tragic figure who's studied and talked about even today. He was betrayed by his beloved country and lost his true love, eventually disappearing altogether. Before his appearance, however, he found the Fruits of Evolution and suggested that they were exempt from the

fate laid out by the Gods. It's said that he gave them to the Gods, knowing that they didn't belong in his hands."

"Okay..."

"The Fruits weren't that easy to get rid of, however, and not even the Gods could destroy them. This is just a theory, but some say that the Fruits are divine power given form, a natural side-effect of sealing a God beneath us. Of course, most still regard the Fruits as nothing more than myths, and very few people study them seriously. Most historians simply accept the theory and move on."

So that's why Zeanos seemed to know so much about the Fruits back when we fought.

Since he'd probably never left the cave he made his lair, there was a good chance he didn't even know he was in the middle of that big forest.

Wait, maybe he did know? I don't have any proof he never left, and Forest is in the dungeon's name.

For a moment, I wondered why his lover Marie had died if he had access to Fruits of Evolution and even knew their revival effects. But she'd probably died before he found them. More importantly, it sounded safe to assume the Gods put the Fruits there on purpose, just to keep humanity from getting at them.

"As an aside," Beatrice-san continued, "it's said that the Gods didn't know what to do with the Fruits, so they sealed them away, just like they did the rogue God."

"I knew it!"

That Forest was just like their garbage can! They could've put a little more care into it, though—the Clever Monkeys and Acrowolves were fighting over the Fruits left and right.

Come to think of it, when I read *The Tale of the Dark Nobleman*, it mentioned that he fled to the Forest with Marie's body after she died. The Forest also had Revivification Grass and the like that could raise the dead. So the Forest probably still had a good dose of power from the Fruits of Evolution or the Gods themselves. That'd certainly explain why he chose that place to hide out.

Beatrice-san seemed to notice the surprise on my face. “Do you understand, then? If you’ve truly found and eaten the Fruits of Evolution, then there’s no telling the effect that could have on the entire world.”

“Uh... I don’t know if you can believe it, but I only started looking different after I ate the Fruits.”

“I’m not surprised. If the records are true, eating the Fruits made you a higher-order being. You were truly born anew. That only proves that your current body is you, beyond a shadow of a doubt.”

I could only stare at her blankly in surprise.

“See?” Saria chimed in with a grin. “I told you, you’re you!”

This time, I replied not with tears but with a heartfelt smile of my own.

Chapter 12: The Monstrosity Stirs

After hearing the truth about the Fruits of Evolution, I glanced over at Kannazuki-senpai to find an oddly dead look in her eyes.

“Hehehe... Seiichi-kun was keeping secrets from me...? I’m not jealous, no, not jealous at all...”

Crap, I guess we totally forgot about her. Of course, she knows nothing about the Fruit or anything. I really should’ve asked Beatrice-san about it some other time.

I tried to think of something we could talk about to include her when I realized there was something important I hadn’t asked yet.

“By the way, how are Shouta and the others doing?”

Looking around, I didn’t see any sign of them—or any of the other Heroes, for that matter.

Kannazuki-senpai’s eyes sharpened somewhat. “Before we get to that, I’d best tell you what our current situation is like.”

“How so?”

“I’ll be blunt—we Heroes are seen as enemies of the Academy.”

“Wait, what?!”

That was the last thing I was expecting to hear.

Beatrice-san nodded in agreement. “I hate to say it, but she’s right.”

“How is that even possible?! Wait, what are you doing here, then? Are you in danger?!”

She exhaled coolly. “My instincts told me that if I didn’t come to the cafeteria, I’d regret it. Faint as it was, I could detect a hint of your smell. Thankfully my nose was strong enough to reunite us.”

“Uh... Okay. Thanks, nose?”

I was totally lost. Fortunately, she didn't dwell on that.

“Personally, I've managed to sway the general opinion enough that most don't recognize me as a threat. Besides, the faculty seems to have an eye on me, so I can't imagine being assaulted in such a public place. Even if they were to try and jump me, I'm plenty strong enough to repel them—I stand near the top of the class, even by the Heroes' standards. There's no need to fret about me.”

“Oh... Okay.”

Hearing her say that was a big weight off my shoulders.

She put a hand to her chest and looked me square in the eyes as she continued. “I assure you, I'll be fine. My virginity is yours and yours alone.”

“That's not what I'm worried about at all!”

“Regardless, I swear to guard my purity with my heart and soul. I want you to be the one to defile me and scar me in the most meaningful way I know how.”

“Uh, visceral much?”

This is a whole new side of her, one I never wanted to know existed!

Still lacking any real resistance to innuendos, I covered my face in my hands.

Why me, anyways? I mean, I'd heard she had a crush on someone back on Earth, but this is just screwed up!

Fortunately, Al cut in unhappily before my brain could short-circuit.

“So? The hell you want with Seiichi, anyway?”

“To lock him in my basement.”

“You could at least pretend to be less horny!” I moaned.

Why'd she have to say that, of all things? I'm starting to get scared!

Kannazuki-senpai's jaw dropped in shock. “Impossible... All I've ever thought about is you. You're all I have. I'd do anything you asked—no, I *will* do whatever you ask.”

“Great! Please be normal, then.”

“Ah, but I already *am* normal.”

“Gah, I’m too late!”

Yeah, she’s about the furthest thing from normal I can imagine. Did somebody change the definition of ‘normal’ when I wasn’t looking? Somebody get me a dictionary.

“But that doesn’t matter now,” she continued, regaining her composure.

“Uh, yeah, it does!”

“Now that we’ve finally reunited, there’s something important I must tell you.”

“What’s that?”

She gestured at my robe. “You’ve been using your name freely, but I’ve yet to see your face.”

“Yeah, about that... I’ve been trying to hide what I look like as much as I can. You’re free to see me, of course. You might not even recognize me if I’m not wearing my robe.”

“Impossible. No matter what you look like now, I’d recognize you in a heartbeat.”

“Okay, now I’m getting worried!”

I mean, she has a crazy sixth sense and can sniff me out in a crowded cafeteria! That’s downright superhuman!

“More importantly, though, I must warn you to avoid the Heroes at all costs.”

“Avoid you? Why?”

“I’d rather not involve you in our mess.” She looked over at Saria and the others. “Besides, you seem plenty happy as-is. I haven’t seen such joy on your face since before your parents passed.”

“Yeah...”

I was bullied even way back then, but I was so happy with my parents that I didn't even mind that much.

"The last thing I want to do is destroy your newfound peace," she continued with an air of finality. "Your happiness is my happiness, after all."

I didn't know how to reply.

"That's why you must avoid the Heroes—and the Kaizell Empire as a whole, for that matter—at all costs. Keep your face concealed, no matter what. Your name seems to pass as an Eastlander's, so I can't imagine anyone would assume you're from Earth. Even the other Heroes wouldn't suspect you—even Shouta and the others would be unlikely to suspect anything. I imagine they would still recognize you if you talked to them, but you look different enough to pass as a stranger." Her expression turned grave. "I must emphasize that the Heroes are not loved here. Of course, the principal reason is that our latent abilities were great enough that we began to denigrate the other students. Ha, we reap what we've sown."

"..."

"Still, I must admit I'm a little... no, a *lot* curious as to what you look like now. Damn those Heroes! Damn them all to hell!"

Uh, you remember you're a Hero, too, right? You're the student council president, even! Think of the election!

She cleared her throat. "Personally, I would like to spend my every living moment with you from now on, but I suppose your safety takes priority. I'll restrain myself."

This may sound rude, but THANK GOD!

"But wait," I asked. "Doesn't that mean we shouldn't be seen together like this?"

"No need to worry. I specifically chose seats for us with minimal visibility—and more importantly, Beatrice-sensei is accompanying us. She may not teach any of the Heroes' classes, but as long as I claim to be seeking guidance from her, I can't imagine anyone would grow suspicious. We've plenty of other

people with us, making it harder to imagine I singled you out to talk to specifically. It should be plenty enough pretense to allay suspicion.”

Come to think of it, she’s right.

That said, I couldn’t just agree to never talk to her again.

“Even if it’s for my sake, I don’t think that’s enough reason to just avoid you.”

“I’m afraid this is the one time I can’t accept your request. Even if you were to approach me again, I’ll simply pretend we’ve never met. I’ve already instructed Shouta and the others to do the same should they ever see you. There’s no point in reaching out to your former bullies, after all. To be brutally frank, you had only a few friends worth talking to at all.”

“Uh... yeah.”

I couldn’t deny that.

So what if I didn’t have many friends? I still had them, and that’s what counts, right? And wait, how has she already talked to Shouta and the others about this when she had no way of knowing I’d be at the Academy in the first place?!

That said, she was right. There were only a few people I was interested in talking to, anyways. It wasn’t like I was afraid of getting bullied again. But there was no point in saying hi to my former tormentors—even if I could shut them down in an instant if they tried picking on me again.

If Kannazuki-senpai was determined to ignore me, though, that was that. I’d leave her alone.

Wait. If I’m pretending to be someone else anyway, why can’t I just be friends with her?

Now that I knew she didn’t hate me, I wasn’t about to just walk the other way.

“But please,” she continued, “fret not about the Heroes. I swear that as soon as I’ve finished my duties, I’ll return to you.”

“If you say so...”

She clearly wasn't going to change her mind, though. I hadn't known her since we were kids for nothing, and once she set her mind on something, she would do it, end of story. The only thing to do now was change the subject as naturally as I could.

"By the way, Kannazuki-senpai, I was wondering. You said you were okay coming here to eat, but where are the other Heroes grabbing lunch?"

It was a little more forceful than I was hoping, but she probably wouldn't mind much.

"The Heroes' lunch? The Academy has it prepared separately and sent directly to their classroom."

Wow, they get room service? They're sure enjoying their Hero's privileges.

"I think that sounds a little extreme," I said dubiously. "I guess things really that bad between them and the rest of the Academy."

Kannazuki-senpai was the heiress of the powerful Kannazuki Holdings back on Earth, so she was extremely adept at reading the mood and reading people. I wasn't about to blindly assume relations had broken down that far, but I made a mental note to not forget what she said.

As my thoughts wandered, she fixed me with a pleading look. "Now, since it seems we won't be seeing much of each other for a while, I'll be taking that figurine of your past self."

"You're not even asking?!"

"If possible, I'll also like a 1:1 scale figure."

"I'm not taking orders, thanks!"

She giggled at my distress and stood up. "Well, I had best be taking my leave now. Lunch break is nearly at its end."

"Wait, one more thing."

"Remember: as soon as lunch is over, we'll be nothing more than strangers."

"I..."

“I’m simply glad to see you’re alive... no, thriving as you are.” She smiled sadly. “We’ll meet again, I promise—and when we do, I’ll be your childhood friend once more, not a Hero.”

Without waiting for a reply, she turned around and left.

I watched her as she left. It was then that I finally noticed the odd armband she was wearing.

Was she always wearing that?

I thought back, but I couldn’t recall ever seeing it on her before. More importantly, it looked distressingly similar to the Collar of Subordination that Origa-chan was wearing. A shudder ran down my spine as I used Analysis on it. Sure enough—

>ARMLET OF SUBORDINATION

Damn, I was really hoping I wasn’t right.

It was clear that the Kaizell Empire was enslaving the Heroes. When they were first summoned, I thought—or rather, I hoped—that they were fine. In that instant, that hope shattered. My only friends from Earth were wrapped up in some upstart empire’s plots.

Fuck them.

Oddly enough, instead of getting angry, I was almost disturbingly calm.

Something inside me had finally snapped.

Chapter 13: The Monstrosity's Wrath

On that day, the birds and beasts of the wilderness ran amok in terror. Even the monsters—from the lowliest Slimes to the mightiest forces of nature—were desperate to flee. Instead of attacking villages as they normally would, they focused purely on escaping, getting as far away as possible. Not a soul could tell what it was the monsters were fleeing from.

Not a soul noticed that they were fleeing from Barbodel Magic Academy.

Even within the academy itself, every living thing froze in terror. Nobody was able to move a finger if they tried. It was as if Death itself had laid its bony hand on their shoulder. There was no literal grim reaper, of course. But they could practically see a horrible something touching them, grinning at them with its unnaturally cold smile. If they tried to look at it, they knew they would die, but not a soul knew why, nor were they afforded the luxury of puzzling it out. All they knew was the primal fear of death.

In that frozen hall of fear, only one person—the beast at the heart of it all, Seiichi Hiiragi, began to stalk toward its goal.

※ ※ ※

What now? What do I do with all this... whatever the hell I'm feeling?

Since I'd finally come to terms with my body and past, I could feel my Stats rocketing out of control thanks to my Unique Skill Perseverance.

No... I know exactly what to do now.

One thing at the heart of it all was the assholes that dared harm the people closest to me—the Kaizell Empire. I'd just destroy them. I'd slaughter every last one of those fucking bastards in every cruel way I could conceive. My only regret was that I didn't know how to make them *really* despair. Maybe I should've taken Eris' classes on sadomasochism after all.

What does it matter? As they say, too little, too late.

I'd have to content myself with wiping them off the face of the world. It'd be child's play to create a new spell that could do that. I would simply erase them utterly, with the cruel benevolence of a god. Then, I could begin to process what they'd done to me.

I imagined the utter nothingness that the Kaizell Empire would become. I stood up slowly, approaching Kannazuki-senpai. She had frozen in place for some reason, but it didn't matter why. All I had to do now was think of that distant land and say my spell's name.

"Ze—"

"Seiichi!!"

At that exact moment, someone wrapped their arms around me from behind. I slowly turned to face the person—or rather, people—who had grabbed me.

"It's okay, Seiichi!"

"Calm down, will ya?!"

"Master, please relax! Let's have something tasty to get our minds off things. That will make everything better!"

"Seiichi-oniichan... no more."

Al and Lulune were grabbing my arms, Saria was hugging me tight around my waist, and Origa-chan had a hold around my legs.



When I saw them, the dark emotion that had been driving me disappeared in an instant.

“Why are you all...?”

“I dunno,” Al admitted. “I just got the feeling that if I didn’t stop you now, you’d regret it for sure.”

“Regret it?”

For the first time, I realized just what I was trying to do. I wasn’t just going to destroy the entire country. I was going to make everyone in the world forget that it existed in the first place. I was going to wipe out not only the top brass in their government but everyone who lived there, too. That was enough to snap me out of my funk completely.

“There’s no point in using your power angry,” Saria said with a relieved smile. “I want you to use it like you normally do and make everyone happy!”

Lulune nodded. “Your powers are wasted on such miserable beings, especially not in anger. Isn’t that frustration making you hungry? Why don’t we have another meal together?”

“Didn’t you decide to just have three meals a day?! Besides, I’m not a meal ticket!”

I couldn’t help but yell.

And wait, how did she know I was about to go genocidal? I didn’t tell anyone about that!

At the sound of my shouting, a wave of relief passed through the group.

“Finally! That’s the Seiichi I love!”

“Damn, you could’ve given us some kinda warning, at least.”

“I happen to know the reason.”

“The hell? You do?!”

“... I know, too.”

“How do you know?!” Al blurted out in shock.

Both Lulune and Origa-chan pointed at Kannazuki-senpai's armband.

"I imagine this is the reason," Lulue explained.

Origa-chan nodded. "Mm. It's bad... really, really bad."

"Wait... what is that?" Al muttered. "I coulda sworn I've seen that design before..."

"... It's an Armlet of Subordination. It's like the Collar of Subordination I had, but weaker. I just noticed."

"Damn! It is?!"

"Yeah," I nodded grimly.

It quickly put a damper on my mood again, but I didn't lose control this time.

I slowly approached her. "Kannazuki-senpai?"

"Hm?! Wh-What was I doing?" Her brow was still slick with sweat as she looked about confusedly.

For the first time, I noticed the entire room was eerily quiet except for us. Every last student either collapsed in a heap on the ground or slumped onto the table in front of them. It was an oddly chilling sight.

"Wait, what happened?!"

Al snorted. "Took you long enough. Don't recognize your handiwork?"

All I could do was shake my head. I honestly had no idea what she was referring to.

"It happened after you got really angry," Saria explained. "When you finally calmed down, everyone was so relieved they fainted."

"Wait, this is all because I got mad?!"

Damn, I'm a walking nuke! I've gotta keep a better lid on my emotions! What, if I cry, I'll cause a flash flood? That sounds so plausible it's scary!

"I-I mean, I *do* have the Skill Pressure, but that shouldn't do anything unless I'm a crazy high level..."

“I don’t think it was a Skill,” Saria suggested. “I think you’re just so powerful that you made everyone *really* scared of you on an animal level.”

So I can knock people out just like that? I mean, I guess my Stats are high enough for that... I’m okay! I’m not ever getting used to this, though!

“K-Kannazuki-senpai! Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yes, I think so... Didn’t you feel that? It was as though the entire world was being bent to some immense will. I must admit, it was oddly... pleasurable.”

“You’re clearly not okay.”

I had no idea how she found that at all nice when everyone else in the room literally fainted.

Is there a doctor in the cafeteria? She’s clearly down bad with something.

As she slowly picked herself up off the ground, I decided to get right to business.

“How did you get that bracelet?”

“This? They were gifts to us from the Kaizell Empire. Apparently, it increases our Stats.”

“...”

It’s official, then; they’re to blame. From the sounds of it, all the Heroes have those Armlets.

Fortunately, I was a lot more in control of my emotions this time, and I didn’t blow up.

I could probably use Judgment to snipe the assholes directly responsible for the Armlets. But I guess the country needs someone to lead it. I don’t know the first thing about their government, so it could just make the whole empire implode.

That wasn’t to say I wasn’t angry, of course. I had every intention of personally ripping a new one in everyone responsible for practically enslaving my friends. And I’d get my retribution one way or another.

“Kannazuki-senpai, I need you to listen carefully. That bracelet is something called an Armlet of Subordination. It forces you to obey whoever put it on you.”

“What?! But according to my Analysis Skill, it’s nothing of the sort.”

“Long story short, I have Greater Analysis, so I can see its real effects. Also, I have a Unique Skill called Clairvoyance, which lets me see the condition of whoever I want. Unfortunately, it clearly shows you have the Subordinated condition.”

“What?!” Her eyes flew open in shock. “How did you get such Skills?”

“As I said, it’s a long story, but I’ll explain it all when we have the time. More importantly, we need to get that thing off you. I may not know why you’re wearing that, but clearly, somebody was lying to you.”

“That can’t be,” she muttered dumbfoundedly.

No wonder she’s shocked. She thought it was helping her all this time, but it was actively harming her.

“Fortunately, I can take it off you, no problem. Just hold still, and I’ll pop it right—”

“No, not yet.”

“Huh?”

“If what you say is true, then the Kaizell Empire clearly has designs for us. If we’re not wearing the Armlets when we return, there’ll be trouble.”

“Why’re you going back there at all?!”

“I’m afraid we must.”

“Seriously, why?!”

“... I wanted to avoid telling you this, as I didn’t want you to worry, but they have our school’s faculty hostage.”

“What?!”

“Not only that. There’s a fair number of students there as well, mainly those unfit for combat as the title of Hero would necessitate.”

There was nothing I could say to that. It was the last thing I was expecting.

“I can’t bring myself to abandon them. No matter the world, as student council president, it’s my duty to protect them.”

“I guess...”

I didn’t want to just them lose, either, but Kannazuki-senpai and the others took priority. Aside from my friends, there wasn’t anyone I really cared about at school. There were just too many of them. Besides, I couldn’t just use Dimension Magic to teleport there, grab them, and teleport back. I needed a good idea of the area I was teleporting to, and even Magic Creation couldn’t give me a workaround. There was a big difference between seeing a place and having been there, so even far-seeing magic or something wouldn’t work. Besides, I doubted Magic Creation would even activate since Teleport did virtually the same thing.

“But what can we even do?”

“There is one thing. I need you to remove this bracelet *without destroying it*.”

“Huh?”

Why would she want to do that? That means I can’t just cast President Lincoln and be done with it.

When I thought about it, I got the feeling that I could probably keep the Armlet intact if I focused hard enough. It was as though my body, finally on speaking terms with my brain, decided to let me know it was possible.

I guess it can’t hurt to try.

With that, I had Kannazuki-senpai stretch out her arm. And I cast President Lincoln while imagining the bracelet harmlessly popping off. Sure enough—“You really can remove it,” she breathed in astonishment as it readily fell off.

“I guess I did it, yeah.”

“Why do you sound so surprised?!” She scooped it up off the ground and held it out to me. “Now, you put it on me.”

“Let’s just get you to a hospital.”

She finally gets it off, and that's where her mind goes?! That's just screwed up!

I managed to prevent myself from yelling at her, but her expression only turned grave.

"I need you to dominate me."

"It's too late for you!" I moaned, holding my head in my hands.

"Relax, I was 0.1% joking."

"So you were 99.9% serious?!"

"Think rationally for a moment. If I return to the Empire without the Armlet, I would get in trouble. Correct?"

"Well, yeah."

"In that case, I need only change who puts it on me. It's the perfect disguise, and I'll have marked myself as yours beyond any doubt. I may be a genius..."

"Nobody needs *that* kind of smarts!"

"Regardless, I need you to put it on me. You don't even have to command me. Please."

She was clearly serious about it; honestly, I could see what she was getting at. As I was mulling it over, however, she grabbed me and forced her hand through the loop.

"Ha! You own me now," she said smugly. "Go on, give me a command."

"Didn't you just say I didn't have to?! I swear you did!"

"I was lying. Who in their right mind would pass up such an opportunity?"

"Could you at least not sound so proud about it?"

"Enough already. I said, *give me an order.*"

"Wait, who's supposed to be the master here?!"

I don't know why she was trying to push *me* around now, especially when she was asking me to take away her free will.

Since was she so hard to deal with?

Worse, the longer I stayed silent, the more her stare seemed to hurt. Fortunately, it wasn't long until the perfect request hit me.

"Okay, Kannazuki-senpai..."

"You wish me to accompany you to bed? With pleasure."

"What kind of inhuman freak do you think I am?!" I regained my composure and cleared my throat. "No, here's my order. I command you to stay safe, no matter what. That's your mission."

"Seiichi-kun..."

"To be honest, you and my other friends are my only priority right now. The other students don't matter to me at all. I know that sounds cruel, but you guys really matter that much to me."

She didn't reply, so I continued.

"You said you didn't want to wrap me up in your mess, but I'm going to remove Shouta and the others' bracelets, too, and you can't stop me."

"But not the others', eh? I suppose you have no obligation to do so, and the less you have to do with us, the better. I suppose I'm not much of a president after all."

"No, I didn't mean..."

"Enough. I understand. By all means, please remove their Armlets as well. Between us, we should be able to protect the rest of the Heroes." She grinned boldly. "I'll make sure to follow your command to the letter, of course... though it wouldn't have hurt to demean me a little more."

I heard that, y'know.



Chapter 14: The Outburst's Effect

On that day, when Seiichi first lost himself to his anger, the effects spread far beyond Barbodel Academy's halls and the local monster populations. The Demon Realm was only one of the victims...

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"WHOA?!"

I, Bel Jizel, was suddenly hit by a chill that sent my whole body quivering.

"You two feel that?" I asked my friends/subordinates, Terry Hemutt and Bosco Dan.

"Y-Yeah..."

"But what's it all mean, Bel-san?"

So I wasn't the only one.

"If we all got that same chill, somethin' bad's clearly happenin'."

"Um, even without that, I can kinda tell something bad's happening."

"Aw, stop whinin'," I snapped. "You're gonna make me cry."

We continued chipping away at the day's task while we talked.

What was that, though?

"Bel-san?" Bosco asked tentatively. "We're a special squad, right?"

"Yeah, 'course we are. We answer to Reiya-sama herself! We're elites, unlike the rank-and-file."

"D-Don't they call us a suicide squad?"

"Dumbass! Whoever says stuff like that's just jealous!"

"No, I heard Reiya-sama and the other top brass saying that."

“... Just get back to work.”

“Please don’t dodge the question! If we’re really elites—”

“You better not finish that thought!”

“—then why are we stuck cleaning the castle?”

“Don’t say it!”

Dammit, Bosco, learn to keep your mouth shut! It’s taking everything I got just to ignore that!

I jabbed my finger into Bosco’s skinny chest. “I told you not to say it! Damn, the last thing I wanna do is dwell on that!” I whipped around at Terry. “What punishment d’you think this guy deserves?!”

“Um... Actually, I agree with him, Bel-san.”

“You too?!”

Fuck, I thought they were my friends!

“Just think about it!” Bosco pleaded. “When’s the last time we got actual orders?”

“What’re you talkin’ about? We put all those teleportation traps around Terbelle, didn’t we?”

“That was your idea.”

“Don’t remind me!”

Thinking back on it, we’d never gotten an actual order, not once.

Except for watching the castle after the Black Dragon God-sama got killed. That’s real important!

“We’re not warriors,” Terry mumbled. “We’re housemaids.”

“C-C’mon, maids do good work! Don’t diss the maids!”

“Aren’t we an elite combat squad, though?”

“Damn!”

Before I could come up with another excuse, however, Bosco pointed at the freshly-polished window.

“Look at this crystal-clear glass, boss! How’s polishing supposed to help us fight better?”

My eyes swam about the room. “W-We could polish the Heroes’ weapons!”

“Are you stupid?”

“Sorry, I am!”

He was exactly right. All the housework in the world would mean nothing out on the battlefield. Terry wasn’t complaining, but I knew he felt the same. That didn’t change our chore list, though.

I took a deep breath, then shouted at the top of my lungs. “ATTEN-TION!!”

“Y-Yessir!” both Terry and Bosco squeaked, instantly straightening their backs.

“Listen up! If you’ve got time to whine, you’ve got time to think about how you can put this experience to use! Just imagine this built-up grime’s the Heroes! Look at that filth... I’ll clean you right outta here!... See? Doesn’t that do wonders for your spirits?”

“I think I get it...”

“You’re a genius, Bel-san!”

“All right, let’s wrap this up! Leave no Hero left standing!”

“Yessir!”

We grabbed our battle mops and washrags and faced off against our foes.

“—This is even dumber than you made it sound, boss!”

“Yeah, ‘course it is!” I retorted, tears brimming in my eyes.

Of course, that shit didn’t cut it.

I let out a heavy sigh. “You wanna complain to Reiya-sama, then?”

“All right, let’s kill the Heroes! Kill ‘em all!”

“Leave it to me, boys! I’m a Hero-killing pro!”

In the end, no matter how tough we tried to act, nothing could match the sheer horror of Reiya-sama's punishment.

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"Hm?!"

I, Reiya Farzer, was suddenly hit by the pressure of some great presence. My entire body went stiff.

What in the world was that?

All of the top brass of the Demon Army had gathered at Routier-sama's call to discuss the pending alliance with the Kingdom of Windberg.

The mysterious pressure aside, however, it was incredibly difficult to process just what had begun to unfold. On one end of the room, the Captain of the First Regiment, Zeros Arbana, one of the strongest demonkind, was clearly prepared for battle. Opposite him were the equally powerful Second Captain Zolua Waltoure and Jade Raven of the Disciplinary Squad, who were likewise up in arms. Zeros was spewing that unsettling mana of his, Zolua was already cloaked in his signature darkness, and Jade's luminescent mana was lighting up his surroundings. I had scarcely seen them so prepared to unleash their full power, but that wasn't what took my by surprise. No, it was the *fear* in their eyes that did it.

"What was that?" asked Zeros warily.

"The hell should I know, you dumbass gecko!"

"Oh, honestly, you two!"

They clearly weren't shaken speechless, but they were the only ones capable of even that. The other captains, myself included, were unable to even lift a finger. Even Ria seemed petrified, and Urs... well, I could see the whites of his eyes clear as day. He'd clearly fainted.

"Do you suppose Routier-sama is all right?" Zeros asked seriously, with a furtive glance at her red door.

“Course she is,” Zolua snorted. “Whatever the hell that power was, it was a long-ass way from here. ‘Sides, it feels pretty random to me, like somebody blowin’ off steam. Ain’t no way it’s aimed at her.”

Jade sighed. “Dearie me, this could be trouble.”

After a tense few moments, the mysterious pressure faded as quickly as it had come. Finally, I was able to move again.

I panted heavily as I tried to regain my composure. “Honestly, what *was* that? As if we need anything new to worry about.”

Zeros nodded sternly. “Indeed, in a direct confrontation with such power, I doubt we would fare well. However, I must add that it did not feel aimed at us—or rather, at demonkind. We have nothing to worry about.”

“Yes, but...”

“Don’t you ever shut up?” Zolua snapped. “It ain’t gonna hurt us! Can’t you be happy ‘bout that?!”

I shut my mouth, but I wasn’t strong enough to feel reassured nor dense enough to forget it so easily.

Perhaps I should send Bel and his team to investigate? It’ll be dangerous, certainly, but I’m not worried about them. They’re a suicide squad, after all.

Zolua jabbed a finger at Urs. “See, look at him! He ain’t shaken... wait, he ain’t even conscious! What a wuss!”

I folded my arms. “Unfortunately, *we’re* still mortal. You’re lucky you’re so strong.”

“Oh, yeah? Reiya the Phoenix is gonna lecture *me* on mortality?”

Come on, you’re a vampire!

To be fair, I *was* a phoenix, and between my Aerial Magic and signature Flames of Life, I had managed to secure my place at the top of the Demon Army. Bel and his underlings misunderstood my powers as Vapor Magic. They assumed I could freely create and manipulate any gas. But unfortunately, all I could do was control what was naturally in the air.

When the Black Dragon God was slain, my Flames of Life brought me to his labyrinth. With them, I could heal any wound short of death with time, but that regrettably didn't extend to removing seals or other unpleasant effects.

If I could dispel seals, though, I could bring Routier-sama's father back to us.

Her father—the Demon King—had been sealed away many years ago now. After losing our first ruler, we were forced to govern ourselves with a council of the strongest demonkind in the realm. We only wanted to live in peace, but the humans' attacks on our people were relentless, and with time our new King met the same fate as the first.

And yet, despite how deeply the humans hated us, Routier-sama wanted to make peace with them. All we could do was support her in every way we knew how, and I wasn't about to let anything stop her.

I took a moment to imagine the emanator of the mysterious pressure.

If they intend to oppose Routier-sama...

"... I'll stop them, even if it costs me my life."

That, I swore.

Chapter 15: Gorilla And Donkey Versus Monstrosity

After Kannazuki-senpai left, the cafeteria was still in chaos. To put it a little more clearly, there was still food scattered haphazardly across the tables and floors, and the students were pretty much in the same state.

This really is a mess. I'm surprised Kannazuki-senpai could just stroll out like it was the most natural thing in the world. To be fair, though, it's all my fault! Man, am I feeling guilty now!

Eventually, everyone started to come to their senses. After some confusion about what exactly had happened, they cleaned up the mess. Some of the more unfortunate students were still face-down in their soup, however.

Uh... they didn't drown or anything, right?

None of them had any way of knowing that I was responsible, however, so it ended up being our little secret. I was somewhat glad that nobody bothered looking into it more. But at the same time, I doubted that such a serious issue should be written off so easily.

Eventually, when Beatrice-san had finally woken up, we all headed back out to the training ground for Saria and Lulune's mock combat against me. Upon our arrival, I noticed that my class was the only one there.

"D-Damn," Agnos muttered. "The hell was that? I've never woken up face-first in the washroom sink before..."

Blud raised an eyebrow. "I'm not convinced your face even made contact, what with that ridiculous hair of yours."

"What, you talking about my smokin'-hot pompadour? This bad boy's half steel-hard, half cloudy-soft! It bent nice an' out of the way of my faceplant and sprung right back when I woke up!"

"I... don't think it's supposed to work like that."

Sorry about that, guys.

Saria, on the other hand, was bubbling with sheer excitement. “I haven’t fought you in forever, Seiichi!”

During our first fight, I’d totally gotten my ass handed to me, so I was curious to see how I’d do this time. More than that, though, I was dying to know how strong Lulune really was. When we were fighting off the monster horde attacking Terbelle, she was able to send a whole pack flying with one kick.

I glanced at her to see how she was feeling, but surprisingly, she seemed shaken.

“B-But I couldn’t possibly raise a hand to you, Master!”

“But we’ve kinda gotta do this... wait, I never asked your opinion on this, did I?”

“I’m your protector! It’s against my noble missive to fight you!”

“Okay, how about this? After this, I’ll take you to grab some food.”

“I’ll gladly face you in combat!”

“Damn, your loyalty’s cheap—not like that’s a surprise!”

Apparently, a small town was within the Academy’s walls, so taking Lulune there would sate her hunger and my curiosity.

With that, I squared off against Saria and Lulune.

Saria puffed out her chest. “I’m waaaaay stronger than last time we fought, Seiichi! Get ready!”

“For food, Master, I will gladly cut you down. Prepare yourself!”

Lulune aside, Saria’s claim deeply intrigued me. She had fought with the rest of the Terbelle Guild in defending the town from monsters at least as strong as her, so it made sense that she’d be at a higher level now, at the very least.

“Is that so? I can’t wait,” I grinned at them, putting on a strong front.

After a tense standoff, Beatrice-san’s voice rang out across the grounds.

“Are you ready? In that case... begin!”

“Here I come, Seiichi!”

As soon as Beatrice-san gave the signal, Saria crossed her arms in front of her chest in an X-shape. I didn't recognize that motion, so I instantly tensed up.

"Get ready for my new power!"

"N-New power?!"

Did she get a strong new Skill or something?

I watched her cautiously, making sure not to let Lulune out of my sight—and then, Saria uncrossed her arms, unleashing her technique.

"Me, make only face gorilla."

"Uh..."

She was perfectly unchanged except for her face. Her face, as she said, was unmistakably that of her gorilla form.

"Okay, *seriously*, who's this kind of screwed-up fan service even for?!"

This is the gorilla in only a button-up all over again! Seeing that face on her hot human body is just so weird! It's like seeing Photoshop work right before my eyes—er, Gorillashop? Who cares?!

"Before, me need transform body, use gorilla strength. Now, me transform only face, full power!"

"How about you at least try to care about how you look?! You're a girl, aren't you?!"

"Hm? Me no understand. This, normal."

"No! No, this not normal, Saria!"

"Ohh... Me, too hot, Seiichi, embarrassed. Say sooner next time. You, so shy!"

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!"

Sure enough, gorilla-Saria, or Goria, hadn't changed a bit.

How is she even jumping to these conclusions?! Honestly, I should be taking notes, and I'm practically known for my positivity! Hats off to her, I guess! And why does she act so differently from Goria? She could learn a little modesty in this form!

“Me, attack now. Flash Arm!”

“Not this again!”

I recognized that Skill from the first time we fought back in the Forest of Endless Heartbreak.

She suddenly disappeared, and before I could react, she reappeared right in front of me. Even though my reflexes were supposed to be downright superhuman at this point, I still couldn't keep up with her speed.

Maybe it's just that kind of Skill?

Fortunately, I was more confident in my ability to deal with her in close quarters.

She unleashed a high-speed punch at me, but I was ready. I sidestepped to flank her, aiming a roundhouse kick at her back.

“Mgh?”

She was surprisingly quick to react, however, somersaulting forwards out of my way.

I wish she wouldn't roll like that in her skirt. I mean, it's a fight, so obviously she shouldn't let something like that bother her, but if she's going to be so careless, she may as well just wear pants or something.

As I was getting distracted, I heard Lulune's voice from behind me.

“En garde... FOOOOOD!!”

“Why's *that* your battle cry?!”

I whipped around to face her, but surprisingly enough, her kick was every bit as fast as Saria's.

Okay, Saria, I get it. She's a monster. But how is a donkey's kick this stupidly fast?! Are donkeys that much stronger than humans in this world?! I mean, sure, I found her at a monster store, and she was kicking the shopkeeper Balzas around like a ragdoll, but this is ridiculous!

Fortunately, it wasn't anything I couldn't handle, and I didn't doubt for a second that I could dodge her attack. Just like with Saria's attack, I nimbly

ducked out of the way, and placing a hand on her extended leg, I flipped her backward.

“Uwagh?!” she yelped as she tumbled backward.

Again, this is why girls shouldn't wear skirts to... wait, never mind, she's wearing pants. Sorry.

At that moment, however, I caught Saria out of the corner of my eye, winding up for another attack.

“Relax, bad. Fistfighter's Flurry!”

“Whoa!”

I didn't know if it was a new Skill or a Secret Technique, but her fist began glowing red with some kind of energy as she unleashed a vicious barrage of heavy punches.

“Mgh! Mgh! Mgh!”

VOOM! VOOM! VOOM! VOOM! VOOM!

Every one of her blows left craters and furrows in the ground from the sheer strength and speed of her attacks, and all I could manage to do was dodge and stare in shock.

Is she trying to kill me?! I mean, that's powerup-energy worthy of the King of the Sea Bandits! Are we even allowed to carve up school facilities like this?!

I glanced over at Beatrice-san and the rest of the class. They all seemed baffled at the intensity of our fight, but I could see a very different kind of horror in Beatrice-san's eyes.

“How much will this cost to replace?” she mouthed dazedly.

“Stop, Saria! STOOOOOOOOP!!”

Nope, no way, no good! I mean, how much does this place cost?! Am I going to have to pay for it?! I mean, I have enough gold to pay for it, but this isn't doing great for my mental health!

She stopped attacking and gave me a quizzical look. “What? Seiichi, want to stop dodging, get hit?”

“Never mind, let’s continue!”

Why would I let her punch me?! That’s worse than vandalizing school property! I’d much rather pay damages! Is it just me, or is she showing the same ruthlessness she did back in the Forest of Endless Heartbreak? I’m never mocking her animal instincts again!

I got an odd feeling as I was recoiling from Saria’s offer. I could only describe it as my sixth sense. I jumped backward just in time for a wave of pure force to tear through the air where I just was. Following the wave back to its source, I spotted Lulune.

“Kh! What ferocious perception, Master! I was sure it was the perfect sneak attack.”

“Uh, no, I didn’t spot you or anything.”

If my sixth sense hadn’t chosen that exact moment to kick in for me, I would’ve gotten hit for sure. It was probably thanks to having finally reconciled my body and mind.

Saria and Lulune put some distance between them and me before launching their respective attacks in vicious unison.

“Flash Arm!”

“Hahh!!”

Saria had clearly gotten stronger, just like she said, and Lulune was startlingly powerful in her own right. I thought I was doing well for myself by carefully controlling all my Skills. The training battles had taught me a lot.

But I think it’s time to wrap this up.

I felt positively relaxed as I caught their respective fist and leg with one hand each.

“Mgh?!”

“What?”

As they widened their eyes in shock, I began to spin them around me.

“Whuh?!”

“Waaaah?!”

Even as they began to panic, I only sped up my revolution. I wasn't even going at top speed, but I'd somehow formed a twister around me, sending dirt and debris flying as I began to *take off*.

Realizing that this wasn't a great situation to be in, I hurriedly slowed down, eventually putting them both to rest on the ground.

“Me, head, spin...”

“Urgh... Why are there such tasty-looking birdies circling my head...?”

It was clear that neither was in any condition to fight now. To seal my victory, I drew White for the first time that combat and tapped them both lightly on the neck.

“Looks like I won,” I said with a grin, relishing every second of my long-awaited win against Saria.

Beatrice-san finally seemed to come to her senses. “Er... S-Seiichi-sensei wins!”

“Whew. Sorry, I guess I got a little carried...”

I didn't finish my sentence, though. When I turned to face the rest of the class where they were watching, I realized that the force of the wind had messed up their hair a startling about, and their clothes were absolutely caked in filth. Even Agnos' prized pompadour was limp and frizzy.

There was a long moment of silence. I broke out in a cold sweat. Beatrice-san still hadn't fully recovered from her shock, and Al was straight-up glaring at me. When I saw that...

“I'm so, so, soooooooooo sorry!!”

I apologized with everything I had.

Chapter 16: A Teacher's Resolve

After that, I restored the training grounds to their normal state. The ground was pocked with craters and massive cracks. But with the help of the Ultimate-tier Earth Magic, Terra Wave, I was able to smooth everything over.

Most Earth magic only went so far as making small amounts of ground or manipulating little patches of earth. But Terra Wave let me freely manipulate the ground of the entire field. I was still using the absolute minimum amount of power, of course. While I was morbidly curious about the area I could manipulate with my full strength, I was far too scared to attempt it.

Nonetheless, I'd been casting almost nothing but spells I'd made myself with Magic Creation, and it was nice to cast some regular Earth magic for once. Terra Wave did a great job of cleaning up, too—although Beatrice-san once again looked at me like I was an alien.

Well, at least it's all over, end of story!

With that, all that remained was to use Wash to clean up the students' clothes and head back to class.

Man, Everyday Magic is awesome.

Even as we returned to class, the students still seemed shocked. Beatrice-san approached the podium and addressed them.

"I believe that Seiichi-sensei now has an appropriate understanding of how strong you all are. On top of that, I believe we've gotten an idea of his strength."

Everyone except for Saria and Lulune began nodding gravely.

They don't have to be so grave about it—though I guess I can't argue with them!

I didn't exactly show them my hand, though—I was seriously holding back, even against Saria and Lulune. That was pretty monstrous in and of itself,

though, so I just kept my mouth shut.

“You’re all full of possibilities,” Beatrice-san said warmly. “I was unable to draw out your full strengths, but I’m sure Seiichi-san will succeed where I came up short. I hope you’ll all continue to give him your best.”

An odd gloom descended over the class. Except for Saria, Lulune, and Berard, each of them had despair on their faces, clear as day. None of them believed in their own strength anymore, it seemed. Even Agnos was depressed, which I didn’t think was possible after seeing him bomb his test.

This isn’t good.

They say that hard work always pays off, but I didn’t believe it was quite that simple. Sure, you could make some great progress on most things as long as they weren’t literally impossible, and natural talent could give you a bigger leg up if you were lucky. The only real difference between the so-called geniuses and normal people was that the former intuitively knew how to overcome the barriers in their way. All that was needed to remove that gap was that knowledge. With it, I believed anyone could be great. Most people who gave up early or decided there was no way to improve further just didn’t know there was a knack at all. The thought was just a little too depressing for me to swallow. I wanted to turn effort into results as efficiently as possible. It was the best way to tell how much energy that person was putting into it.

I’m probably the worst person to go on about effort and the like, though. All my strength is from a bunch of fruits I accidentally ate. Still, I like to think it took a lot of effort to accept myself and a lot of effort to accept a gorilla as my wife. It’s all thanks to that hard work that I can puff out my chest with pride and say I love Saria!

On top of that, I could see that everyone in the class definitely had the potential to use magic; they just hadn’t figured out how to do it. There was a chance that everyone in the world had the potential to use magic—after all, everyone had mana, so even if they had no elemental proficiency or anything, there was still the attribute-less Null Magic. If they couldn’t even do that, they had to be approaching it wrong. It was nothing like Skills—Louisse was totally unable to use any, for example.

Most of all, they had a real monster like me to teach them. Even if they didn't seem to be able to pick up magic before, I had a knack for dragging that potential right out of them. I wasn't a god, but I was a 'human' with the potential to hit that level someday.

I looked out over the class and took a step forward.

"Don't worry. I promise I'll make it so each and every one of you can use magic."

Everyone stopped and looked up at me. Al was cringing a little, but Saria was grinning happily, and Lulune and Origa-chan seemed to really respect me.

Was that a little too high and mighty of me? Either way, it looks like it's time for this human-slash-monstrosity to get to work!

Chapter 17: The Academy Town

The day after I announced I'd make them all able to use magic was a day off. Since I'd promised Lulune that I'd treat her to something tasty for fighting me, we had arrived in Academy Town to relax and make good on my promise.

As the name suggested, Academy Town was located on Barbodel's campus. I didn't believe a whole village could exist inside a school like that, but after leaving the main building's back gate, it was only a short distance to the crowded streets of stores and stalls. We'd gone through the front gate on our way in, so I had no idea it even existed.

As an aside, Al was busy preparing for her classes starting the next day. Saria had already agreed to hang out with Flora and the other girls, so they weren't with us.

You have to prepare for classes? I don't remember hearing anything about that.

I was honestly blown away by how social Saria was. If I was a transfer student, there was no way I'd be able to go out with friends, especially not on such short notice.

Regardless, that meant that only Lulune, Origa-chan, and I would be going to town. I arrived at the Academy's back gate a little early, and there wasn't a lot to do there, but fortunately, the two girls arrived quickly enough. Lulune was wearing her uniform, and Origa-chan was dressed in the same ninja-like robes she always seemed to wear. It looked very comfortable and easy to move in, and it fit her just as well as any dress could.

"Sorry for the delay!" Lulune apologized. "Were you waiting long?"

"Nah, not really. Let's get going."

"Yes!"

"... Hungry, you're drooling again."

“Wh-What?! Don’t be ridiculous!”

Seriously, Lulune? We’re nowhere near any food stalls yet.

I couldn’t help but smile at their exchange as we passed through the gates. Sure enough, we came across the Academy Town before long. It was full of students enjoying their day off, as well as villagers from the nearby villages, making it feel just like Terbelle. One of the interesting things about it was that nobody lived there. Since Barbodel was something of a neutral territory, it was maintained by donations from countries the world over. Merchants were similarly invited from all over and received special Academy permits to run the place. As a result, the population was made entirely of merchants.

As we walked down the street, I spotted everything from proper stores in the buildings to bazaar-like stalls where people could barter for goods. The inside stores housed everything from weapons to armor and accessories, and the stalls I could see were selling everything from street food to the most puzzling items I’d ever seen.

Really, what are those things even for?

The shopkeeper noticed me as I peered over at one of the stalls.

“Hey, you! You’ve got something rather unpleasant behind you. With the help of my merchandise, however, you can get rid of it in no time!”

He was wearing a robe that made him look suspicious more than it helped him blend into his surroundings.

... Wait, I guess I can’t really point fingers on that front.

Nonetheless, it was a strange way to start a conversation, and I wasn’t eager to continue it.

“No thanks.”

“Oh, don’t be like that, sir! What about this lovely vase? Not only will it deal with your evil spirit issue, but it’ll also fix your bad luck with the ladies!”

“I have what?!”

I’m just racking up misfortune, huh? Sounds really fishy.

He reached under his table and pulled out a large pot.

“This is the Evil-Eating Vase. It’ll gobble up all the bad mojo around you. It’s a must-have for a dashing young man like you!”

Something about it seemed oddly familiar, though.

Wait... It can’t be.

I used Greater Analysis on it just to be sure.

>VASE OF HAPPINESS: A vase that may or may not make you feel lucky. If you buy it, the shopkeeper will be happy indeed.

“GUAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARDS!!”

I knew it; it was the same stupid thing I saw back in the Terbelle item shop!

The shopkeeper was startled by my scream, but before he could flee, the guards rushed in and took him away.

Maybe they should vet the merchants’ wares more carefully.

I shook my head with disbelief, but Lulune was already tugging me ahead.

“Master, look! They have grilled chicken over there! Let’s go!”

“... Hungry, you’re drooling again.”

“I-I am *not* drooling!”

Sorry, Lulune, you’ve got a full waterfall going on there. You’d better wipe that. Actually, it’s really gross.

Watching Origa-chan wipe Lulune’s mouth put the spring back in my step. When we arrived at the stall, Lulune greedily pored over their menu.

“Hey, welcome!” the stallkeeper said. “What part would you like?”

“All of it!”

“What?!”

He seemed surprised that Lulune had such an appetite, but fortunately, he was willing to sell out his whole stock to us.

Wait, I count way more than thirteen parts of chicken here. What exactly is this?

Regardless, I paid Lulune's bill since she still didn't have any pocket money. I made sure to give Saria plenty of money before she left, though.

The shopkeeper gave me a knowing look as he accepted the coins. "You sure got it rough."

"Huh?"

"In the, uh, grocery budget."

I couldn't reply to that.

Even after moving on, Lulune's appetite was unmatched.

"Yakisoba! Get your steamin' hot yakisoba here!"

"I'll have what you're making now—and everything you packed for later!"

"You what?!"

"We got takoyaki, hot and fresh straight from another world!"

"Give me everything!"

"Huh?!"

"Welcome! We have plenty of—"

"Whatever it is, I want all of it!"

In time, Lulune had eaten literally all the food in sight. Neither Origa-chan nor I had a clue how to react to that.

Lulune stopped for a moment to take a break. "Ahh... You know, I could really go for dessert."

"You're *still* hungry?!"

I was almost curious just what the limit of her appetite actually was.

After Lulune had devoured enough dessert to placate her, we started walking again in search of a place to rest. Before long, Lulune stopped and pointed at a sign.

“Look, Master! There’s a place to rest?”

“Great! Let’s go—”

As soon as I saw the sign, I froze. The building was styled like a small castle, and the sign-out front read *The Love Nest*. I spotted a number of young couples—students, probably—heading inside.

Oh, god. They have love hotels in this world? Or actually, love hotels in their schools?! Are they crazy?! This is a place of learning! Why bother splitting up the guys’ and girls’ dorms, then?! Just what is this school administration getting at?!

As I stood there gasping, Origa-chan gave me a curious look.

“... Are we going in?”

“Nope. Absolutely not. Let’s find literally anywhere else.”

Her confusion only deepened, but she nodded. “Okay... if you say so.” That seemed to sate her, but then she reached out toward me. “... Can we hold hands?”

There’s no way I could take a sweet little kid like her into a den of depravity like that!

In the end, we were able to find a more wholesome place to rest. After that, we left to explore the town a little more, and we found that there were actually a decent number of places to have fun as well. After wandering there for a while, we even saw a brothel. To my horror, we arrived just in time to see a teacher disappear inside.

Is this a hallowed place of learning, or isn’t it?! Why are there so many horny places?! I mean, I swear we passed a casino, too! Everything here’s a bad influence on kids, and the teachers not only know about it, they’re indulging, too!

There weren’t any arcades or karaoke places like on Earth, either. Everywhere I looked was just another thing Origa-chan shouldn’t see, and in the end, we left without stopping once.

Just before we left, we all got some ice cream.

“Did you two enjoy yourselves?” I asked as we left.

“Of course, Master! There was plenty of good food to be had!”

“... Nn. I’m happy.”

They were both smiling, so I figured it was a job well done. It wasn’t a date by any measure, but it was nice to hang out with them.

Origa-chan’s brow furrowed in confusion. “Why didn’t we rest at the rest stop?”

“U-Uh...”

Lulune nodded. “It was quite the hassle, finding another place to rest our feet. What was so wrong with that first place?”

I didn’t reply. I had no idea how to.

Of all the things I thought we’d see here, that wasn’t one of them! Who thought that place was a good idea? Barney-san?! I wish he’d think of his students a little more! I don’t want Origa-chan learning that shit yet!

I continued to dodge their questions the whole way home.

How come this trip ended up exhausting me more than it calmed me down?

I still had no idea whose great idea that was, but I resolved that I’d punch them in the face if I ever met them.

Chapter 18: Evil Creeps Closer

Close to the Academy lay the Great Forest of Barbodel. Countless creatures, monsters, and otherwise, called it their home, making it the ideal place for school excursions. As such, the teachers would periodically scan the woods for threats and cull the monster populations to only the minimum necessary level.

In the center of that forest, however, a man who didn't properly belong there was resting on an old stump. He wore a long white coat like a doctor might, as well as a pair of glasses—a rare article in his world. Between his fine grooming and elegant pose, he was quite picturesque on his perch. However, something about him felt decidedly threatening—perhaps having something to do with the mounds of mutilated monsters surrounding him.

“How utterly disgraceful. Even so-called A-Rank monsters are nothing more than sacks of flesh—even more so when their souls have departed this plane. Doesn't this simply bore you to no end, Angreia?”

Without turning his head, the air behind him warped and twisted, and a tall woman clad in a frilly gothic dress emerged.

“I see you haven't changed a bit, Demioros.”

Demioros' grin deepened. “So? What brings you all the way to my neck of the woods, so to speak? I thought your territory was quite far from here.”

“I have a proposition for you. How would you feel about joining forces.”

“Oh?” Even through his glasses, the interest was clear in his violet eyes.

“I trust you've heard of Kreiss' failure,” Angreia drawled. “We've been rather short on the negative emotions needed to revive the Wicked One as of late—in terms of volume and quality. That old imbecile's failure only worsened our situation, and that isn't even counting my rather incompetent servants' shortcomings. Why, do you think, they keep failing?”

“How should I know?”

“It’s simple. Each and every one of them worked alone. But what if we worked together? The amount of negativity we could feed to our dark lord would only increase, and the risks of failure would be greatly lessened. Doesn’t that sound efficient?”

“So you’re lonely, is that it? You need me to hold your hand and walk you through it?”

“Just what are you implying?” There was a hard edge in Angreia’s voice now.

Demioros ran a hand through his purple hair and snorted. “Why do you think I would fail in the first place?”

“My, such confidence! I certainly hope you aren’t getting full of yourself. Pride comes before the fall, you know.”

“You’ve no need to concern yourself with that—but I’ll accept your proposal nonetheless.”

“My, that was quick. What changed your mind?”

“Despite my complaints, I believe your approach is valuable. I hate to admit it, but the quality of the despair I produce is nothing compared to yours. What I am confident in, however, is volume. It was nothing but trial and error, really. If we were to combine our methods, however, just imagine what we would be able to achieve.”

“You’re always so difficult,” she sighed. “Couldn’t you have just agreed in the beginning?”

He cackled. “Hahahaha! Impossible, I’m afraid. I’m twisted to my core. Nonetheless, I look forward to our collaboration.”

“Likewise.”

She extended a black-gloved hand, and Demioros readily accepted it. The second they touched, a wave of inexplicable pressure hit them like a wave.

“What?!”

“Hm...?!”

Neither of them had ever felt such overwhelming power before. Despite the fear that gripped their hearts, they understood exactly what it meant.

“So the Wicked One himself blesses our alliance, does he?”

“That’s the only explanation.”

With that, they felt convinced that the Wicked One was watching them, ignorant of the dire warning the pressure’s true owner posed.

There was one question remaining to Demioros, however.

“Angreia. Why did you choose me, of all people? You were right to do so, of course, but you surely had other options.”

“What, isn’t it enough that I respect your strength? Though, of course, I must admit the main reason was your proximity to Barbodel Magic Academy.”

“The Academy?” His brow raised in surprise. “Do you honestly intend to attack them?!”

“Of course.”

“The Heroes are there, you know.”

“*Future* Heroes. Now, they’re barely more than children.”

“Yes...but I don’t believe it would be wise to expose ourselves yet. You’re certain about this?”

“Don’t worry about that. After all, there would have to be *survivors* for the word to get out.”

He shook his head. “You’re insane.”

“Am I? And here I thought you were the crazy one. Look at the smile on your face!”

Sure enough, he was grinning madly. His mind was already brimming with visions of the Academy’s halls, bathed in blood.

“And here I was just mourning my past ineptitude,” he sniggered. “I should’ve visited them *years* ago. Perhaps that pressure was a scolding from the Wicked One?”

“Oh, enough about the past. Let’s enjoy the present, Hellbringer.”

“Yes, let’s...Slaughter Princess,” he said with a refined sneer.

With that, the Cult of the Wicked One began to plot against the Barbodel Magic Academy—all the while being blissfully ignorant of a monstrosity named Seiichi that lurked within its halls.

To be continued in The Fruit of Evolution: Before I Knew It, My Life Had It Made

Back Matter

Author: Miku I'm a university student, and I love karaoke and reading. Flawed as it may be, I sincerely hope you enjoy my work. (August 2016)

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I was born on November 17 in Shimane Prefecture. My favorite things are cooked potatoes and summer skies. (August 2016)



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